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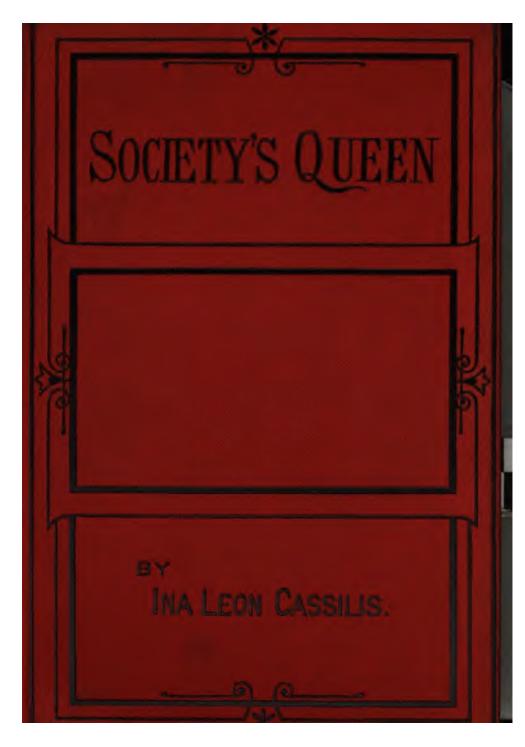
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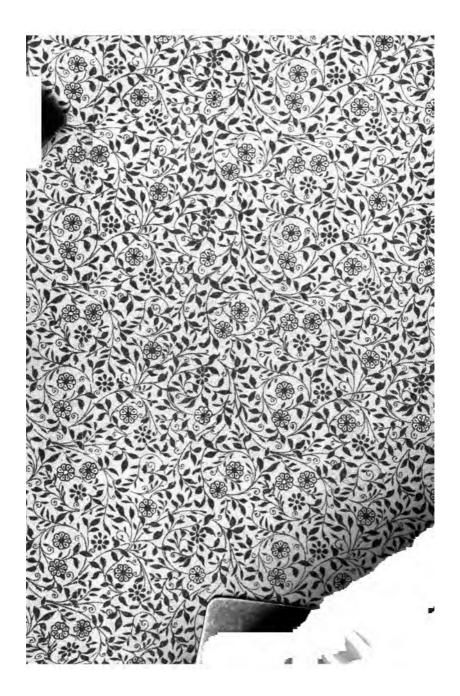
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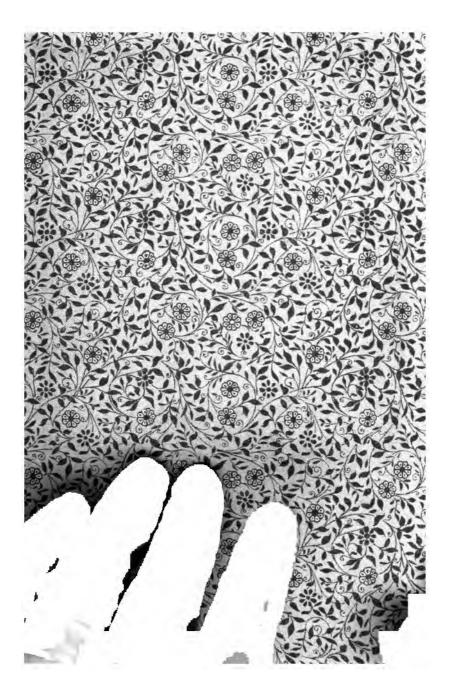
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SOCIETY'S QUEEN.

A NOVEL.

 \mathbf{BY}

INA LEON CASSILIS,
AUTHOR OF "A LOVELESS SACRIFICE," ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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SOCIETY'S QUEEN.

CHAPTER L

THE WEIGHT OF EVIDENCE.

Chandos Royal, with its rich carving and priceless pictures, its stained glass, and domed ceiling painted by Vandyck, where princely hospitality had

been dispensed, and, in ancient days,

"Crowds of knights and barons bold In robes of peace high triumphs told,"

was assembled the Court before which the proud chief of the House of Devereux was practically arraigned as a murderer. It was no motley mob of mere sight-seers that thronged the room; there was hardly an unfriendly face to be seen; the neighbouring gentry, the tenants and servants of Chandos Vol. II.

Royal and Rougemont—these formed the audience. Vivian had been asked if he des'red a postponement in order that his solicitor and counsel should have time to attend. He answered, "No;" he could speak for himself. He preferred to have no delay.

Without, in the courtyard, stood a line of private carriages—among them one plain dark brougham that had come from Temple Rest; and a groom close by held a horse that had

brought the Rector of Rougemont.

Within, the coroner, a grave elderly man, had taken his place, and was speaking in a low tone to the surgeon who had examined the corpse. The jury talked to each other in whispers. Some of these men were comparative strangers, and were evidently much impressed by the scene in which they were such important actors. The inspector and his coadjutor and the two principal witnesses were objects of interest and attention, and, to judge by the faces of not a few there, of no little enmity; for the tide of feeling was in Vivian's favour. Near the door by which the accused was to enter stood Doctor Coryn.

A little before the appointed time for commencing the formal business of the Court, a man of medium stature, on whom the Chandos Royal servants looked with no friendly eyes, glided quietly in, and took up a modest position close to the entrance, half hidden by the burly form of Farmer Tredegar, behind whom he placed himself. Then there was a stir and a murmur. Doctor Corvn turned quickly. Who was this? A tall slender girl, in deep mourning, with a face of Southern beauty, proud and calm, but full of such woe that for this alone it must haunt the memory of whoever looked on it—a face across whose deathly pallor a momentary crimson flush passed as she saw that all eyes were turned upon her. But it faded as quickly as it came; and, bowing her head in mute and graceful acknowledgment of the gentle courtesy that instantly yielded place to her, she took, with her servant, a position where she could see the prisoner's face, but was not near him. Rector's gaze followed her, fascinated, and rested in absorbed interest on her features.

"This," he said, inwardly, "is Vera Calderon. Her face will haunt me while I have life. She is surely worthy of him. God in His mercy

help her!"

Footsteps without. The door opened again. There was an indescribable start, an electric current of feeling shooting through the throng. With parted lips and straining gaze every face was turned to the entrance, and a strange awe stilled every tongue. In the breathless hush was heard the murmur of the servants' voices in the courtyard without, and the metallic rattle of the harness of the horses.

With nothing added to and nothing abated from his usual proud mien, with a face calm and stern, and eyes that glanced with a quick, steady, penetrating gaze from face to face, Vivian Devereux entered the room; and it seemed like some ill-timed jest that the policeman should be by his side; for he looked, with his unconscious air of dominion, lord and ruler of them all—not a prisoner and an accused man, who might leave that room for a prison cell.

"God bless him!" came in a half sob from

many there, as he passed to his place.

"He guilty?" said the women. "Never!

Look at him!"

. 2

But the voice of the coroner ordered silence, and the murmur was hushed. It touched Vivian deeply, though he did not show it; but, when his eyes rested on Vera's face, when for one second he met her gaze, his own wavered. He turned aside, folding his arms, to crush down the suffocating throbs of his heart; and for a moment he struggled, and not in vain, for the composure he had hitherto preserved.

The first witness called was the surgeon. His evidence, stripped of technicalities, was that Sir Marmaduke Devereux had met his death from a dagger wound, such as might be produced by the weapon found in the wood. The wound was so deep and strongly given that there was little blood shed. The bleeding

was internal, and death must have been almost, if not quite, instantaneous. It was impossible that such a wound could have been self-inflicted.

Asked whether he wished to question this witness, Vivian simply bowed and answered, "No."

So soon as the jury returned from "viewing the body," John Trewyn, labourer, was called. He deposed to having seen Vivian Devereux riding from the direction of the wood. did not notice Mr Devereux's manner particularly; he was riding at a furious pace that was all. Subsequently the witness went to the wood with a companion, attracted by the baying of Mr Devereux's bloodhound, and they found the body of Sir Marmaduke. He was lying just as he had apparently fallen, and was quite dead. The dog was by him. The witness's "mate" went for the police, and he searched about to see if he could find any weapon, and presently found, among the underwood, about ten feet from the dead man, a dagger, which he gave up to the police. was stained with blood recently shed.

The evidence of the other labourer was only corroborative; and then came the policeman. He had examined the body, and found Sir Marmaduke's watch, rings, and money untouched. Evidently the murder had not been committed for the purpose of robbery. He

afterwards placed Mr Devereux under arrest at Chandos Royal. He was wearing the same clothes as when he was, by his own admission, near the spot where the murder was committed. There was not a single stain of blood on him.

After this witness had concluded, there was a manifest movement of expectation. Would Vivian Devereux speak, or would he throw the onus of proof on his accusers and allow the servants at Chandos Royal to be called?

There was a moment's dead silence. Then, in the musical, finely-modulated voice that would have filled twice the space as easily as it filled that room, Vivian Devereux spoke.

"It seems to me," he said, "unnecessary to call witnesses to prove that which I do not deny. I am not only willing, but anxious to make a simple and concise statement of the circumstances of that morning, so far as I know them and have had any part in them."

"The Court," the coroner replied, "will be happy to hear you, Mr Devereux; but it is my duty to caution you, though doubtless you are aware of the fact, that anything you may say may be produced against you."

Vivian bowed slightly.

"Thank you. I am aware of the fact; but, as I shall speak only the truth, I shall not fear what I may state being used elsewhere."

In clear, terse sentences, without one superfluous word, yet omitting nothing bearing directly or indirectly on the circumstances, Vivian Devereux then told the tale of that momentous day. He seemed more to avoid than to seek any sympathy, speaking rather as if he were a witness called upon to "a plain unvarnished tale unfold," in which he had no personal interest, than the man most deeply concerned in the issue; but this very reticence, and the dignity of his mien and manner, carried his hearers with him.

Touching lightly upon the ill-understanding between his brother and himself, he related briefly the events preceding the murder—the removal of the picture, his discovery of the fact, and his determination to seek his brother to compel him to disclose what he had done with the portrait. And Vera knew well what it cost his proud and sensitive spirit to lay bare the cruel wounds.

"I will not deny," said Devereux, folding his arms again, "that I was roused to fierce passion—so fierce that I would not heed my faithful servants when they urged me not to seek my brother. My object in seeking him was simply to compel him to confess to me what he had done with the picture of Lady Devereux—my mother. It must be assumed at this point that I—perhaps in a blind impulse, perhaps in more deliberate thought—

took from the drawer in the library the dagger produced here. I did not. A day or two after the costume ball—at which I wore that dagger-I put it in the drawer of a table in The last time I heard of it was that room. when Mr Calderon of Temple Rest was, accompanied by my father, looking over a collection of arms and armour. Mr Calderon afterwards made some remark to me about the dagger; but I myself never saw it from the day I carelessly threw it there. The idea of threatening my brother's life never for one second—so help me God!—occurred to me. At Temple Rest I ascertained that my brother had called and had left by—as the servant believed—the carriage-road. I took that road, cutting into it by way of the Quarry Fields, which skirt the wood. I never entered the wood; I did not notice that my dog left me. I was too preoccupied to think even of him. I rode straight back here; and the first I heard of my brother's murder was when I was told of it by the witness Trewyn. This is the simple truth. For the rest—though I would not press this—I may at least ask whether my conduct, my demeanour, anything in word or act in me, from the time I returned from Temple Rest, was consistent with the theory that I had just perpetrated the crime of murder, or even manslaughter, on the person of my own brother."

A deep murmur, which for a moment the coroner did not attempt to check, ran through the assembly. The jury were evidently con siderably influenced by the statement just made, and by the personal fascination of the accused man; to some extent also, doubtless, by his exalted position in the social scale, and his brilliant reputation. Against all these things, however, was to be set a strong chain of circumstantial evidence, which, by the very fact of raising the crime above the level of cruel and long-premeditated murder, told more fatally against the prisoner.

Asked if he knew of any person who had an enmity against the deceased and against himself likely to incite to the commission of the double crime of the murder of the one brother and the involving of the other in the accusation, Vivian replied that he did not know of any such person. To one or two other questions he replied in the same manner, without hesitation and without concealment. Two of the witnesses were then recalled, and asked concerning the prisoner's manner of receiving the intelligence of the murder, and their answers were certainly in Vivian's favour. Then some of the servants were examined as to whether the prisoner went straight out from the room where the picture was hung, or whether he turned aside. Judging by the time occupied, it appeared that Devereux

went straight out; but, on the other hand, the library lay on the passage from the White Room to the hall; and no one had followed Vivian's movements from the second-named room to the entrance. They could not swear that he had not turned aside.

Then the coroner summed up. With great perspicuity he placed the circumstances before the jury. He gave due weight to all that told for the accused—notably to the fact that there was no trace of blood upon him; but, on the other hand, it was to be remembered that the evidence showed that the wound bled internally. The weapon was exceedingly sharp, and there was hardly any external hæmorrhage. He ended with the usual formal exhortation, and then the jury retired, and there was perfect silence.

Every eye was fixed on Vivian Devereux, and he stood motionless, with eyes bent down and compressed lips — outwardly the least

agitated man in the room.

Percy Everest watched him keenly, but could detect no sign of emotion; he noted, however, that Devereux never once, after the first glance, looked at Vera Calderon. She stood with locked hands, and features composed into death-like calm, from the very intensity of agony. She knew what the verdict would be. There was no gleam of hope, no flutter, half of dread, half of expecta-

tion, in her heart, nothing but the despair of

an awful certainty.

There was a slight commotion among the crowd as the coroner's jury returned, after a few minutes' absence. Vera turned her face towards them, without any change in its stern hopelessness. Vivian lifted his eyes, and in one swift, keen glance read the answer to the coroner's question before it was put; and it was noted that he smiled a little scornfully, and shrugged his shoulders. The inherent satirical temperament asserted its sway, and saw a grim philosophy in this irony of fate.

"We find," said the foreman of the jury, with all due solemnity, "that the deceased, Marmaduke Geoffrey Chandos-Devereux, died by murder, and that the instrument of such murder was the dagger produced in court. And we further find that Vivian Rohan Chandos-Devereux did feleniously, wilfully, and of his malice aforethought, kill and murder the said Marmaduke Geoffrey Chandos-

Devereux."

There was a momentary hush. Probably the majority of the audience had expected no other verdict; but yet, when it came, it seemed to paralyse them. They looked at one another; certainly the evidence was terribly strong, the provocation given overwhelming. Vivian had every motive for denial; he was by nature and training eloquent and per-

vent sample out that in the or Francy are in the passage from Louis to the half and no one France movements from the room to the extrance. They or that he had not turned aside.

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She is the property of the

suasive; he knew how to produce effect by the very reverse of the usual means; he had exceptional personal advantages. These things told in his favour; but he was haughty, passionate; there was no love, but strong enmity, between himself and his brother; he was, so some of those present had heard, a man of reckless, even profligate, life; he might make falsehood wear the garb of truth. argued many of the educated, the county gentry, and others. The feeling of the tenantry, however, was almost wholly in his favour; led far more by feeling than by reason, they would not believe it possible that the handsome, brilliant, patrician gentleman, who had ever a gentle word for the lowest and meanest, and showed no pride to them—their dear Mr Vivian of whom they were so proud—could be guilty of murder. He had never told a lie in his life: if he had done the deed, he would have owned it.

"I'll never believe it—never!" cried Farmer Tredegar, in strong vernacular, and a deep, almost ominous hum answered him.

The women sobbed; the men did not seem inclined to take matters quietly—Jedwood justice recommends itself to these Cornishmen sometimes. But the coroner sternly enjoined silence, and when it was obtained, which was not immediately, he proceeded to formally

commit the prisoner for trial at the next assizes at Bodmin.

Then Vivian Devereux spoke once more.

"One grace," he said, quietly, to the coroner, "I would ask of your courtesy, that, before I am removed to Bodmin, I may be allowed to give certain directions concerning my brother's funeral, and one or two other matters, privately or not, as you may please. I will not dispute your dictum."

"Certainly, Mr Devereux," replied the coroner, "you are welcome. It will be sufficient if you are ready to leave this place in an hour from now. Whom do you wish to see?"

The answer was unexpected by all—most of all perhaps by the person named.

"Doctor Coryn, the Rector of Rouge-mont."

The coroner bowed assent; and, quietly saluting coroner and jury, Vivian Devereux turned and moved towards the door. Then he saw, with haughty indifference, how some held back, and looked on half doubtful and sorrowful. He did not blame them; he knew how strong against him was the evidence; but it seemed well-nigh to break his heart when the tenants and servants gathered round him, and with sobs and passionate protestations declared that they would never believe him guilty. Among them his quick eye noticed Fordham, who kept back because he knew how the scene

must try his dear master; but Vivian, passing near him, clasped his hand closely, and, stoop-

ing, whispered,—

"Fordham, if I had listened to you, this would not have come upon me. Forgive me, faithful friend! I forgot in my passion what I owed to you and to myself."

Choked with grief, the man could not answer; he kissed the hand that held his, the hand guilty, henceforth, to the world of shedding a brother's blood, and rushed from the room.

"God bless you, sir!" cried Farmer Tredegar, as Devereux reached the door. "Justice will be done yet. God bless you, Mr Vivian!"

A figure stepped from behind the burly farmer, and laid a passing touch on his arm.

"You forget, farmer," said Percy Everest, reprovingly—"you forget, 'Sir Vivian,' now."

The farmer's arm was lifted, but Vivian's

quick hand restrained him.

"Remember the dead," he said; and then he turned to Everest with a look that he never forgot, with quiet words that he remembered in the time to come too well. "One day," he said, "I will repay your courtesy, Clinton Everest—not in words, but in deed."

And he kept his promise.



CHAPTER II.

"DARKER AND DARKER"

HE door of the library closed on the prisoner and the Rector.

Vivian turned and looked full in

the priest's face.

"Doctor Coryn," he said, "do you believe me a murderer?"

The Rector stretched forth both hands and clasped Vivian's right hand, which he had not offered.

"Let this be my answer," he said, "and Heaven my witness, that I believe you as innocent of this crime as I know myself to be."

"Doctor Coryn," said the young man, passionately, "you have seen me but three times in your life; the first was to rebuke me for sin of which I thought lightly, the last is to see me accused of murder. The first sin I frankly owned; the world counts it nothing; I lost nothing by avowing it. The last I

deny; I gain everything by denial; and yet there is nothing but my bare word to speak for me. What makes you believe me innocent?"

"Your bare word, Vivian Devereux. And why do I trust that, knowing you so little as I do? Well, tell me why you love Vera Calderon, and trust her, and I will try to answer you."

And Vivian said no more.

This faith in him, in one almost a stranger, moved him beyond all power of speech. Vera's faith he would never have questioned; she loved him, as such women love, without fear, and that was enough. But he had no claim on Wilford Coryn's trust. Yet it was given. He did not realise how much there was in himself to call it forth; he had not the clue to what seemed to him a mystery.

Willingly Doctor Coryn undertook the charge Vivian asked of him, as the man, above all others, to whom he could entrust the conduct of the funeral of the unhappy master of Chandos Royal, and sundry other things, for which Vivian gave him carte blanche.

"But surely," said the Rector, struck to the heart by the manner in which Devereux spoke, "they cannot condemn you?"

"I cherish no hope, Doctor Coryn. Even if I am acquitted, thousands will believe me guilty, unless the real murderer can be found.

But to the future I will not—dare not look yet."

The Rector was silent for a moment; he knew not how to answer such words.

"You knew," he said, when he could speak, "that Miss Calderon was in the court?"

"Ay; I looked at her once. I could not do so a second time. It was the one thing that might have broken down my guard."

"She is in the ante-room, waiting to see

you."

"Let her come in," said Vivian, in a low

tone,—"I can meet her now—alone."

The Rector went out, and the black-veiled figure in the ante-room passed him on the threshold. The door closed behind her.

"Vera!"

She sprang forward into his open arms, clinging to him in such wild, voiceless grief as seemed to wring her very life-blood from her drop by drop; and he, clasping her to him, heart to heart, soul to soul, till every throb seemed but the beat of one life, yet knew not all that robbed her of the power to weep, denying even the relief of tears.

It might have been hours, it might have been minutes, for all the heed they gave to time, before a sound broke the long silence of that close embrace. Then Vivian spoke very softly.

"Vera, my heart's life! regrets are useless vol. II.

now. It would have been better if we had never met. But the die is cast. Let me speak to you in the short time now left; for I have something to say that must be spoken."

She lifted her head then and looked up at him with passionate, despairing eyes—

"Heavy with unshed tears;"

and tenderly, with clinging, lingering touch, he put back the silky hair, and pressed his lips to her brow.

"Vera," he went on, "I cannot risk this trial. I cannot anticipate acquittal; and, if I am condemned—though doubtless the sentence would be commuted—"

He stopped, and it was a full minute before

he could speak again.

"I cannot," he whispered, bowing his head on hers—"I cannot face it! The mere thought makes my brain reel. Bear with me, Vera; I shall be calmer soon."

How could she give comfort? Her very soul seemed numbed. He had been hurled down, in the glory of his youth, when all the flowers of his splendid career lay at his feet—torn rudely, in a few hours, from ambition, hope, love, to suffer for a crime that he had not committed. Oh! what but cruel mockery could be even a look that spoke of hope and trust? And Vera—alas, alas!—would have shrunk from his clasp, from the touch of his

lips, but dared not; and yet, in the very moment when it seemed that she could not endure the tokens of his perfect love, she clung to him the more closely, as though in that very love she seemed to betray she sought strength for her terrible task.

Once more will conquered; once more

Vivian spoke.

"I must escape, Vera. It will be easier now than after the trial. If all is prepared, once free of prison I can trust to myself. A fishing-boat would take me across to France; from that country I can readily reach Spain. and in Spain I shall be beyond the reach of law. My cousin Saint Léon is in the south. He always loved me. I will go to him; and then I can write to you."

Vera paused.

"It would be the better way," she said, slowly. "I can manage all, if one thing can be safely carried out—the escape from the prison."

"That, I think, can be accomplished by bribing the gaoler," returned Vivian. "I must sound him first; for he might—by a strange sternness of fate—prove invulnerable,

and then all would be lost."

"He would not prove invulnerable to the sum I should offer," said Vera; "provision for life, a free passage to Australia—"

"Child, no! It must not come through you."

"Through whom else, Vivian? Alphonse? No. How could they punish me? Do I gain nothing by being high-born and wealthy—ay, and beautiful? Who would condemn a woman for aiding her lover to fly from disgrace? Have no fear for me, Vivian, and leave all to me. Listen. You trust Alphonse fully?"

"Fully; but he must not come with me. He can, if he so wills, follow me; but I will not ask him, well as he loves me, to become an exile for my sake. And now, Vera, the time allotted is well-nigh past. I shall see you again, my life, before we part perhaps—no, just God! it cannot—shall not be for ever!"

And in that moment, held to his heart, enfolded by his love, her own heart crushed down the awful voice that whispered "for ever" and spoke his own words—the words that had answered the foreboding fear so terribly fulfilled,—

"Earth cannot—God will not—part us!"





CHAPTER III.

MORTMAIN.

EVER within living memory had such excitement reigned in society as that which was evoked by the case of Vivian Chandos-Devereux. The

report of the inquest was devoured with intense and eager interest, and a philosophical mind would hardly have failed to notice that, while the uneducated classes, especially those with strong radical opinions, inclined to the belief that the accused man was guilty, men of his own position leaned decidedly to the view that, appearances notwithstanding, his noble and dignified declaration of innocence was worthy of credit. There were not a few who maintained that if he had been guilty the provocation, especially to a passionate man, was sufficient to excuse him; but those who knew him persisted that "Devereux was incapable of a lie."

In political circles the trial was awaited with an anxiety not wholly unselfish. The accused man was too brilliant an addition to the Conservative strength in the House for his possible loss to be regarded as anything short of a

calamity.

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He evidently placed the fullest confidence in the business capacity and other qualifications of his strangely-selected trustees, as he left them unlimited powers. His favourite dog Alba and his horse Selim were also given in charge to Vera. Mr Seymour, aghast at the management of an immense property being left to a young girl and a foreigner, ventured to remonstrate; but Vivian was firm.

"You think, doubtless," he said, "that my heart affects my brain; not so. When you come to know Miss Calderon, as you will, in assisting her with your legal advice and experience, you will find that I have not overrated her capacity for a charge so onerous that I should hesitate to ask her to undertake it but that I can so fully trust her; and she will carry out to the letter everything I should wish done. My cousin also is accustomed to the management of property, and, though his health at present will not enable him to come to England, I know that he will do what I

must try his dear master; but Vivian, passing near him, clasped his hand closely, and, stoop-

ing, whispered,—

"Fordham, if I had listened to you, this would not have come upon me. Forgive me, faithful friend! I forgot in my passion what I owed to you and to myself."

Choked with grief, the man could not answer; he kissed the hand that held his, the hand guilty, henceforth, to the world of shedding a brother's blood, and rushed from the room.

"God bless you, sir!" cried Farmer Tredegar, as Devereux reached the door. "Justice will be done yet. God bless you, Mr Vivian!"

A figure stepped from behind the burly farmer, and laid a passing touch on his arm.

"You forget, farmer," said Percy Everest, reprovingly—"you forget, 'Sir Vivian,' now."

The farmer's arm was lifted, but Vivian's

quick hand restrained him.

"Remember the dead," he said; and then he turned to Everest with a look that he never forgot, with quiet words that he remembered in the time to come too well. "One day," he said, "I will repay your courtesy, Clinton Everest—not in words, but in deed."

And he kept his promise.



CHAPTER II.

"DARKER AND DARKER."

HE door of the library closed on the prisoner and the Rector.

Vivian turned and looked full in the priest's face.

"Doctor Coryn," he said, "do you believe me a murderer?"

The Rector stretched forth both hands and clasped Vivian's right hand, which he had not offered.

"Let this be my answer," he said, "and Heaven my witness, that I believe you as innocent of this crime as I know myself to be."

"Doctor Coryn," said the young man, passionately, "you have seen me but three times in your life; the first was to rebuke me for sin of which I thought lightly, the last is to see me accused of murder. The first sin I frankly owned; the world counts it nothing; I lost nothing by avowing it. The last I

deny; I gain everything by denial; and yet there is nothing but my bare word to speak for me. What makes you believe me innocent?"

"Your bare word, Vivian Devereux. And why do I trust that, knowing you so little as I do? Well, tell me why you love Vera Calderon, and trust her, and I will try to answer you."

And Vivian said no more.

This faith in him, in one almost a stranger, moved him beyond all power of speech. Vera's faith he would never have questioned; she loved him, as such women love, without fear, and that was enough. But he had no claim on Wilford Coryn's trust. Yet it was given. He did not realise how much there was in himself to call it forth; he had not the clue to what seemed to him a mystery.

Willingly Doctor Coryn undertook the charge Vivian asked of him, as the man, above all others, to whom he could entrust the conduct of the funeral of the unhappy master of Chandos Royal, and sundry other things, for which Vivian gave him carte blanche.

"But surely," said the Rector, struck to the heart by the manner in which Devereux spoke, "they cannot condemn you?"

"I cherish no hope, Doctor Coryn. Even if I am acquitted, thousands will believe me guilty, unless the real murderer can be found.

But to the future I will not—dare not look yet."

The Rector was silent for a moment; he knew not how to answer such words.

"You knew," he said, when he could speak, "that Miss Calderon was in the court?"

"Ay; I looked at her once. I could not do so a second time. It was the one thing that might have broken down my guard."

"She is in the ante-room, waiting to see

you."

"Let her come in," said Vivian, in a low

tone,—"I can meet her now—alone."

The Rector went out, and the black-veiled figure in the ante-room passed him on the threshold. The door closed behind her.

"Vera!"

She sprang forward into his open arms, clinging to him in such wild, voiceless grief as seemed to wring her very life-blood from her drop by drop; and he, clasping her to him, heart to heart, soul to soul, till every throb seemed but the beat of one life, yet knew not all that robbed her of the power to weep, denying even the relief of tears.

It might have been hours, it might have been minutes, for all the heed they gave to time, before a sound broke the long silence of that close embrace. Then Vivian spoke very

softly.

"Vera, my heart's life! regrets are useless vol. II.

now. It would have been better if we had never met. But the die is cast. Let me speak to you in the short time now left; for I have something to say that must be spoken."

She lifted her head then and looked up at

him with passionate, despairing eyes-

"Heavy with unshed tears;"

and tenderly, with clinging, lingering touch, he put back the silky hair, and pressed his lips to her brow.

"Vera," he went on, "I cannot risk this trial. I cannot anticipate acquittal; and, if I am condemned—though doubtless the sentence would be commuted—"

He stopped, and it was a full minute before

he could speak again.

"I cannot," he whispered, bowing his head on hers—"I cannot face it! The mere thought makes my brain reel. Bear with me, Vera; I shall be calmer soon."

How could she give comfort? Her very soul seemed numbed. He had been hurled down, in the glory of his youth, when all the flowers of his splendid career lay at his feet—torn rudely, in a few hours, from ambition, hope, love, to suffer for a crime that he had not committed. Oh! what but cruel mockery could be even a look that spoke of hope and trust? And Vera—alas, alas!—would have shrunk from his clasp, from the touch of his

lips, but dared not; and yet, in the very moment when it seemed that she could not endure the tokens of his perfect love, she clung to him the more closely, as though in that very love she seemed to betray she sought strength for her terrible task.

Once more will conquered; once more

Vivian spoke.

"I must escape, Vera. It will be easier now than after the trial. If all is prepared, once free of prison I can trust to myself. A fishing-boat would take me across to France; from that country I can readily reach Spain, and in Spain I shall be beyond the reach of law. My cousin Saint Léon is in the south. He always loved me. I will go to him; and then I can write to you."

Vera paused.

"It would be the better way," she said, slowly. "I can manage all, if one thing can be safely carried out—the escape from the

prison."

"That, I think, can be accomplished by bribing the gaoler," returned Vivian. "I must sound him first; for he might—by a strange sternness of fate—prove invulnerable, and then all would be lost."

"He would not prove invulnerable to the sum I should offer," said Vera; "provision for life, a free passage to Australia—"

"Child, no! It must not come through you."

"Through whom else, Vivian? Alphonse? No. How could they punish me? Do I gain nothing by being high-born and wealthy—ay, and beautiful? Who would condemn a woman for aiding her lover to fly from disgrace? Have no fear for me, Vivian, and leave all to me. Listen. You trust Alphonse fully?"

"Fully; but he must not come with me. He can, if he so wills, follow me; but I will not ask him, well as he loves me, to become an exile for my sake. And now, Vera, the time allotted is well-nigh past. I shall see you again, my life, before we part perhaps—no, just God! it cannot—shall not be for ever!"

And in that moment, held to his heart, enfolded by his love, her own heart crushed down the awful voice that whispered "for ever" and spoke his own words—the words that had answered the foreboding fear so terribly fulfilled,—

"Earth cannot—God will not—part us!"





CHAPTER III.

MORTMAIN.

EVER within living memory had such excitement reigned in society as that which was evoked by the case of Vivian Chandos-Devereux. The

report of the inquest was devoured with intense and eager interest, and a philosophical mind would hardly have failed to notice that, while the uneducated classes, especially those with strong radical opinions, inclined to the belief that the accused man was guilty, men of his own position leaned decidedly to the view that, appearances notwithstanding, his noble and dignified declaration of innocence was worthy of credit. There were not a few who maintained that if he had been guilty the provocation, especially to a passionate man, was sufficient to excuse him; but those who knew him persisted that "Devereux was incapable of a lie."

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ask of him, and that he will work harmoniously with Miss Calderon."

"You talk," said Mr Seymour, deeply moved, "as if acquittal were impossible."

"I have no hope of it," was the calm answer.

"And now let all necessary papers in connection with this business be prepared and duly executed before I see you concerning the trial. There is time enough for that, as the assizes will not be held for another three weeks. And before another week," he said to himself, when once more alone, "the sea shall roll between me and England."

As Mr Seymour walked away from the prison door, around which stood a gaping crowd, he heard a laugh, and, turning, saw an old woman, about whom there was little to attract attention, in the act of tottering along by the wall, leaning on a stick.

He went on, too much preoccupied to pay any attention to insignificant people or incidents; but the woman looked after him and laughed again, and then looked up at the prison windows.

"You cannot save him," she muttered,—
"no, no, Down in the dust—it has come at last! The elder murdered by the hand of the younger, without time to cry to Heaven for mercy—a grave for the one, a living tomb for the other. Ay, Vivian Devereux, you have fallen indeed—you, who have never yet

failed—what are you now? A prisoner in a narrow cell! What will you be a month hence? A convict, breaking stones! Yes, it has come at last! It is my turn now—mine!"





CHAPTER IV.

A STRANGE TRUST.

HE clock of the beautiful old church of Rougemont had just struck nine as Doctor Coryn pushed aside his sermon-notes, to which he could

not give his mind this evening, and leaned his head upon his hand in deep and painful thought, in which Vivian Devereux was the central figure. Almost at the same moment a carriage stopped outside, the gate was opened, and, after a short interval, a servant entered the study, and handed a card to the Rector. He glanced at it and said,—

"Admit Miss Calderon at once, please."

The servant retired, and Doctor Coryn rose as the door opened once more to admit his unexpected visitor.

If he had been impressed by the view of Devereux of Rougemont's betrothed which he had obtained in the great banqueting-room of Chandos Royal, that impression was deepened now; but there was no rest, no real repose, in Vera's face; its outward almost stony calm as she came forward, resigning her hand to the Rector's close warm clasp, was but a veil; the soul within—

> "Heaved moaning like the ocean, that cannot be at rest,"

and spoke in dumb anguish in the mournful eyes and in something inexpressibly pathetic in the tones of the sweet, low voice.

The gentle priest, thus meeting, thus clasping the hand of the woman Vivian Devereux loved, was too overcome to speak; but Vera had schooled herself sternly, or was perhaps past yielding now to comparatively transient emotions.

"Doctor Coryn," she said, collectedly, "I ought to apologise for the hour of my visit to you. It was not of my choosing. I have come to you because your sacred office would in itself make inviolable the trust I wish to place in you, and because I know Vivian Devereux reveres and trusts you."

"My child," returned Doctor Coryn, with a trembling voice, "if there is anything in which I can serve you, command me."

"You can serve me," the girl said, with strange, solemn earnestness of manner—" one day, Doctor Coryn, you may know how much.

Will you take charge of a packet that I have with me—under certain conditions?"

"What are the conditions, my child?"

"These—firstly, that you will be content to ask me no questions, to be totally ignorant of the contents of the packet."

She paused. Doctor Coryn looked at her

steadily. She met the look unflinchingly.

"I can trust you," he said, "I will agree to this."

"Your trust is not misplaced, Doctor Coryn. My second condition hardly needs to be mentioned; it is that you breathe not to any living soul the charge given to you. The third is that you will not open the packet unless by my desire, or in case of my death. In either case you will find, on breaking the seal, the directions I wish carried out with regard to it. Am I asking too much, Doctor Coryn? You do not know me; if you have any scruple, do not hesitate, out of any feeling of kindness or of sympathy, from expressing it. I have a claim upon you in all that belongs to your office; but what I now ask is no part of that."

"I cannot," said the Rector, gently, "refuse a charge so solemnly confided to me, and most of all by you, my child. I would to Heaven that I had power to help you far, far more—to do something to lift the terrible load of suffering that has fallen upon your

youth. But words of comfort, perhaps even the assurance of sympathy, must seem a mockery now."

The girl's lips quivered convulsively; tears

rushed to her eyes.

"No, no," she said, brokenly, "not a mockery—from you, too, who know him so little, and yet believe him guiltless. But I cannot bear sympathy now. I have need of all my strength. I cannot pause yet to weep; and—and—oh, hush—in pity, not one word! I am not worth it. See," she went on hurriedly, drawing forth a small sealed packet; "this is the packet. I know not how to thank you for this service. God reward you!"

She took his hand in her own and kissed it; she could not say more, it seemed; and then she turned quickly to the door as if she

could not trust herself.

"Must you go, my child?" said the Doctor, anxiously.

"Ah, yes! I must not stay now."

She had reached the door, and then half turned, even moved a step towards where Doctor Coryn stood. It seemed to him—remembering afterwards those painful moments—as if she would have knelt; but she suddenly pressed her hand over her eyes, and, without another word, opened the door quickly and went out, forbidding him by an

almost imploring gesture to follow her to her carriage.

She reached Temple Rest, and went straight

to her dressing-room, where Aileen sat.

"He has taken it—the packet," she said, kneeling down by her faithful servant and hiding her face in her lap; and then she burst—not into tears, but into most bitter sobs that shook her fragile frame to its centre. "Oh, Aileen—oh, Aileen!" she cried, in her anguish, "am I wrong? I am in torture. What shall I do? I would have knelt for his blessing, and I dared not—I dared not ask him to say 'God keep you!"





CHAPTER V.

"THE LINK MUST BREAK AND THE LAMP MUST DIE."

another scene in this strange drama of two lives that seemed placed above the fierce storms of mis-

fortune was being acted out.

There were two figures in the group, a man sitting on a low seat, a girl kneeling by him, his right arm circling her, as she nestled close to him and leant her head upon his breast, listening while he spoke in quiet subdued tones.

"I have no fears, Vera, for to-night. The man will scarcely prove faithless; he would lose much and gain nothing by it; and truly I think, sweetheart, you have touched some better feeling than the mere love of gold. Once free, and it will be no man born of

woman that can recapture Vivian Devereux! I fancy, too, that the hue-and-cry will not at first, at any rate, be very fierce. To the future I cannot look yet, Vera. I have left all things to your care—so soon as the law permits you to undertake the charge—and to my dear cousin Saint Léon. It is a heavy charge, but one you will fulfil for my sake; and, if I am selfish in asking it of you—"

"Hush!" whispered the girl. "Hush!

Not that, Vivian!"

There was such quick pain in her voice that he was compelled to be silent for a moment; but his soft kiss on her brow pleaded for for-

giveness.

"Let it pass then," he said, presently, in that patient, measured tone which to the keen ear reveals the resolute control of strong feel-"There is little more to say, my darling; and perhaps, for both our sakes, the time of parting were best shortened;" and yet, while he spoke, he involuntarily tightened his clasp of the slight form from which he must so soon be severed, perhaps for ever. "I am acting— I can only act—for the immediate present. I know that flight will bear the impress of guilt. I know that many who have thought me innocent, or at least have wavered in their minds, will decide that I am guilty. care not for that; my task will be to find the murderer of Marmaduke Devereux.

that day—which will surely come—I will endure the world's judgment. Your love, your faith, are mine, Vera, for life and for eternity."

Not now—not in this supreme hour of unspeakable anguish—could she breathe the thought that even this love—the only thing left to him—must be torn from him. If she spoke, it must be of hope, of comfort; but the parched lips could not frame the words; she could only cling about his neck, tearless and dumb; she could only feel that they must part.

A heavy step sounded without, and with it came the harsh rattle of the prison keys—Vivian started.

"Vera," he whispered, hoarsely—"oh God, speak to me—one word—Vera!"

The agonised appeal gave her strength. She raised her head and looked up into the noble face that she might never see again.

"I know," she said, and surely the words came from no effort of her own will—"that God's justice will discover the truth, that the day of reckoning will come, and then—then—"

She faltered, paused, and, as, with a grating sound, the key turned in the lock, a stifled cry burst from her, and she clung to him with a wild, despairing clasp.

One last long kiss, one last minute—"silence and a stirless breath"—and they were parted. The prison door closed with a sullen clang, and all was blank to Vivian Devereux—

"A sea of stagnant idleness— Blind, boundless, mute, and motionless."





CHAPTER VI.

FREEDOM.

HERE was a solemn, muffled tread of mourners, and by the flickering light of tapers were seen the snowy robes of priests and choristers, the

dark pall drooping from the coffin borne aloft. There was no pealing organ, no stately pomp of music and ritual, no throng of noble relatives—only the low chant of the priest and the soft sad responses of silver-voiced choristers echoing in mournful whispers among the dark aisles and far away into the lofty spaces of the groined roof that utters an unending response to the moan of the sea below the rocks. So in the deep night they laid to rest the murdered lord of Chandos-Devereux.

Had there been no pause between the blow of the assassin's hand and the hand of death? Had the eyes that would look no more on mortal man looked on the face that mocked with the memory of intolerable wrong? Had a merciful touch rested—if but for a second—on the dying brow? Had there been one ray of light flashing into the parting soul, bringing to the ashen lips words spoken with such passionate depth of pathos? "None!—God knoweth it—none!"

Can Heaven alone answer? Those lips are ever silent; this wasted, sinful life has wrought out its terrible retribution, and even in its miserable close has stretched forth a dead hand to blight the life of the man who, despite all wrongs, all bitter memories, would, even at the eleventh hour, have given a brother's love.

What was it people said? What was the report? Vivian Devereux escaped—fled? On the contents bills of the morning papers, crowding out almost all other news, appeared the announcement—"Escape of Sir Vivian Chandos-Devereux!" In the columns of the newspapers themselves a brief telegram made the following startling announcement—

"At an early hour this morning—between two and three—it was discovered that Sir Vivian Chandos-Devereux had made his escape from Bodmin Gaol. No particulars could be obtained up to the time of the despatch of the telegram; but it is said that the gaoler is missing also, and, if this is confirmed, the mode of escape is easily explained."

"By Heaven!" exclaimed Lord Sydney Tollemache, after reading the news in the hospitable hall of the Marquis of Landport, "I can see who is at the bottom of this!"

"She is a brave, noble girl!" cried the Marchioness, leading a soprano chorus. "What magistrate would dare to punish a woman for saving her lover?"

"Oh, she will get off lightly!" said the Marquis. "But it looks terribly like guilt."

"He is certain to be taken," declared another.

"Such a marked man has no chance."

"He'll not be taken," put in an old Oxonian.

"No, no! I'd stake a thousand pounds on it!"

And he did—not there, but in the smokingroom with another "fellow;" and bets ran high for the next fortnight as to whether Devereux would "get clear" or no.

Further particulars came later; but no trace of the escaped prisoner was discovered. The news concerning the gaoler was confirmed; and it was evident that, whether Miss Calderon or Chandos-Devereux had bribed him, that functionary had not only yielded to the temptation of gold, but had contrived to place himself beyond the reach of outraged authority. All the foreign police were communicated with, and England was scoured; but nothing came of it. By whatever means Vivian Devereux, despite his striking personal appearance, had managed to elude all search, he certainly did

manage it; and within ten days of his flight a rumour floated from mouth to mouth that he was in Spain. And, ere that rumour had flitted from Paris to London, Vera Calderon was pressing a letter passionately to her lips, and repeating again and again,—

"Safe, safe! Oh, Vivian-my life-safe at

last!"





CHAPTER VII.

ONE NIGHT.

that letter assuring her of her lover's safety, Alphonse presented himself at Temple Rest, and was

at once admitted to Miss Calderon's presence. Had "monsieur" reached Spain? When told of the substance of the letter, the faithful servant burst into tears. He must go; he could not live without "monsieur;" and indeed the next morning he left Rougemont to join his master.

Did Vera break down now? No; the extraordinary force of her character seemed to render her incapable of yielding to reaction.

"There is no reaction," she said to Aileen.
"There will be no rest for me. It will be one long, fierce struggle henceforth. It will not kill me while my life is needed. When the task is finished—then—not before—reaction

may come, and, if it kill me then, death will be welcome."

So, from the depths of her soul, spoke the beautiful, envied lady of Temple Rest; and she was not yet twenty years old! She wrote the next day to Mr Seymour, and he was amazed to hear from her so soon; he was still more amazed when he came and saw her, calm, grave, business-like. He murmured some courteous words about hesitating to intrude upon her had she not desired it. She answered him,—

"I am grateful for your kindness, Mr Seymour; but why should I waste precious moments? I have no time to sit down and

weep beneath the willow."

The solicitor bowed, and looked covertly into the speaker's face. This singular girl utterly puzzled him. She was not unfeeling. No; her features might seem wrought in marble, the dark eyes might be tearless, the lips firm; but the passion and the suffering in her face could not be blotted out, however pride and will might veil them.

Before entering upon the special business for which she had sent for Mr Seymour, Vera referred to the subject of the trial, and asked the solicitor's opinion upon the whole matter.

He gave it frankly and succinctly.

Sir Vivian Devereux, had, he said, perhaps done himself some mischief by refusing to face

a trial; at the same time, the evidence against him was so strong that, unless important contradictory testimony were forthcoming, he was afraid the issue must be condemnation. although, as the crime might come under the head of manslaughter, the penalty would probably be reduced to imprisonment for a term of years. The crime must have been committed by some one who had an enmity against both brothers, and who wished to fix it upon the younger. Did Miss Calderon know of any clue? Did Sir Vivian suspect any one at Chandos Royal? It was difficult to imagine any stranger obtaining possession of the dagger.

Vera, standing by the mantelpiece, turned

and looked steadily at Mr Seymour.

"You," she said, calmly, "suspect Sir Vivian to be guilty. No apology—it will make no difference in my respect for you and my reliance on your good faith and advice. How can those who do not know him be blamed for a suspicion which wrongs him most in believing him capable of a lie? There is no shadow of reason to suspect any inmate of Chandos Royal. I know of no reason to suspect any one about here. Sir Vivian has spoken to me of one person against whom there is nothing to which tangible shape can be given—an old woman who once met Sir Vivian and myself, and spoke with hatred of the house of Dev-

ereux. She certainly could not have struck with her own hand so strong a blow as that which killed Marmaduke Devereux, and I do not know any means by which she could obtain a weapon which she must first have known where to find."

"Hem!" said Mr Seymour, thoughtfully. "Still, if this woman could be found—"

"By English detectives?" questioned Vera, ironically. "Well, let the attempt be made. I can tell you nothing of her, except that I saw her in the park at Chandos Royal on the night of the costume ball. I did not see her face."

"It is useless, then, at present, to take any action," said Mr Seymour, not unnaturally confirmed in his view of the case by the absence of any ability, even in Vivian, to name any one upon whom he could fix a reasonable suspicion, and the philosophical manner in which Vera accepted the knowledge that her lover was believed guilty. "Surely," the lawyer argued inwardly, "a woman would fire up at such an idea if she believed him innocent." A keener psychologist than Mr Seymour might have made this mistake. Vera was not a woman whose character could be easily read. He turned to the subject of the property; and he speedily found that, wherever and however Vera, in her Continental wanderings, had acquired her knowledge of and aptitude for business, Vivian Devereux was right when he credited her with such capacity. Although acting trustee until Miss Calderon came of age, Mr Seymour regarded himself in the light of Vera's agent, knowing that it was her wishes that were to be his guide, and in everything he deferred to her. In the immediate present all that was done was to close up Chandos Royal and Rougemont. From the latter none of the servants were discharged, from the former only the newer servants; the older ones retained their places.

Alas! when would Chandos Royal open its gates again to its lord? And would that girl, with the deathly-white face and "weird haunting eyes," who glided noiselessly through the long galleries and paused ever and anon to caress the noble hound who walked by her side and looked up to her with wistful, yearning gaze, as if she could give him back his lost master—would this beautiful girl ever be the mistress of these noble halls? Her own lips murmured, "Never, never!"

.

Is it not that some figure that comes out from yonder copse in the park of Temple Rest and pauses for a moment, half in the moonlight, half under the shadow of the trees? And what is that other blackform upon which the bright rays flash for a moment? A female form seemingly, clothed in a long mantle, with the hood drawn

over the face. It is lost now, before more can be seen than this; but why has the other—the slighter, younger figure—halted? Why, with a whispered "Hist!" is the white hand, from which a gleaming diamond sends forth a thousand scintillations, placed over the mouth of the huge bloodhound by her side? denly the parted lips are closely compressed, the listening expression changes, a terrible look comes into the dark eyes; the hand is withdrawn from the dog's mouth and clenched with the other so tightly that the blood almost If look and thought starts under the nails. could slay, the man she sees rapidly crossing the glade would be a corpse at her feet.

"Miss Calderon," he says, in a low, wondering tone, as he draws near, "here—at this

hour!"

She has mastered herself by this time; it is a face of haughty surprise she turns to him.

"I might retort, Mr Everest," she says. "I

thought you were in London.'

"So I have been. I am down only for a few days. I came principally to see you."

"I ought to feel flattered, I suppose"—with such a bitter sneer as Vivian has never seen her wear; "or have you come on some business?"

"You are cruel," Everest says, speaking calmly, but with something in his manner—it does not need to be broad and open for her to

see it—that makes her feel the subtle pressure of a power to which she must yield. "Did Sir Vivian Devereux teach you to be satirical? It is a dangerous weapon. So," he continues, carelessly, keeping by her side as she moves forward, "you are trustee—or will be in another year or two—of all his property, and owner of what he can transfer by deed. Even his favourite dog and horse are yours, and his ring also"—glancing at the diamond, a brilliant of rare lustre, on the third finger of her left hand.

She does not answer him—does not even look at him. She is terrified at herself to think that, if at that moment the dog should spring at him and pull him down, she might perhaps leave him to his fate.

"He intends you," says Everest, presently,

"to keep his memory green."

"Talk of something else," the girl breaks out abruptly, so fiercely that her companion falls back in vague alarm and amazement, "or leave me! Are you mad? Am I made of stone? You know me better than that, though you know me so little. Do not tempt me too far, Clinton Everest, or you may yet lose all you are playing for."

Everest stands silent, looking at her.

"No," he says at length, "I do not know you. I shall know you better—in time. Meanwhile I obey. I will talk no more of

Vivian Devereux. It will be well for him—and for you—if he never crosses my path."

The girl's eyes seem literally to glow like

fire as she faces him.

"And for you!" she says, with an intensity of passionate scorn that actually cows the man before her. "Take care, Clinton Everest; we share power. It is not all yours!"

She turns and walks on. Everest pauses a moment. His lips close over his teeth, his

eyes gleam with a cruel light.

"Love her!" he half mutters. "Can I love her? Her passion crushes me; I have none to meet it. She awes me, and yet dazzles, bewilders me. Love! Well, what need? But I will yet be master of Temple Rest."

A few swift strides, and he is by her side

again.

"Do you threaten?" he says, in a low tone, not bending down—he has no need—for he is somewhat below the medium height of man, and Vera's tall figure has the advantage of him.

"Threaten!"—in the same manner—then with a sneer again—"Cowards threaten—I only warn."

"Do you? Shall I warn also?"

They have reached the gate of the pleasaunce now; and, as Vera lays her hand on it, she turns with an air of supreme indifference,— "If you like," she says, toying with the chain of her watch.

Whatever he meant to say, the girl's look and manner check the words on his lips. He glances towards the house and pauses; he must wound her.

"Another time," he says, "not now. For the present, adieu." Then, glancing at the bloodhound, who stands close to his young mistress, as if he feels that he is deputed guardian, and looks at her companion with no friendly eye, he adds, "Love me, love my dog!" Well, he is not friendly to me, but I have reason to be grateful to him; he has done me good service."

"He may do better yet," Vera answers, quietly, laying her hand on the animal's head; and with these words she opens the gate and passes through; and Everest does not attempt

to stop her.

A year and nine months roll by;—a year and nine months that work strange changes in Vera Calderon's life—that have made her trustee of the broad lands and princely revenues of Chandos Royal and Rougemont—sole trustee at present, for the Count Saint Léon is still compelled to remain in Spain, though he writes from time to time, expressing the hope that he shall be soon restored to health, and so enabled to take his share of the responsibility that he has

willingly undertaken. And Vivian, too, writes, but not very often. He bears nobly his terrible exile, as beseems Devereux and Rohan. But cannot Vera read between the lines? And does not the iron that has entered so deeply into his soul pierce her too—ay, with a yet more cruel stab?





CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE "LECTURE ROOM."

HE first week in May, and town is filling fast. The park, the galleries, the opera, all blossom with beauty, and at Christie's, Tattersall's, and

the Clubs the loungers scrutinise art and make bets, and talk the scandal of the town.

It is "Private View" to-day. The Academy is a very good one this year, they say. But few amongst the fashionable throngs that are pouring into the rooms have come to see the pictures in a general sense; they have come to see, in addition to each other, the picture before which an ever-shifting crowd revolves all day, humming and buzzing "like the murmur of many bees"—the full-length portrait of a woman standing quite alone on the banks of a river, the form flung out in bold relief against a background of soft, sad sky, the sky vol. II.

of early dawn. The rich robes of garnet velvet droop in picturesque folds round the slender figure, the pose of which is the ideal of majestic grace; the hands, lightly interlaced, are hanging down before her, and the diamond on the third finger of the left seems almost to flash into the spectator's eyes. But, striking as the entire figure is—painted with all the richness of colouring and poetry of conception of the best school of Italian art—it is the face that rivets the gaze and makes it actual pain to withdraw it, though there is pain in looking;—a face of singular beauty sternly enduring. One could fancy a smile bright and sunny, but not happy; and the eyes—gazing out straight before her—"eyes that should look out over a dreary wasteweird, haunting eyes meant to express all depths of misery"—had they looked on something the memory of which was burnt into that girl's soul? Did they dread some unknown—some awful future? That single portrait—that Spanish-faced woman in her garnet robes—is a tragedy, a history, in itself. challenges and compels attention.

The visitor turns to the catalogue, half thinking that it can be no portrait of a modern beauty after all, and reads, "No. 897, Miss Vera Cecil Marie Calderon, of Temple Rest, Cornwall." The painter bears an Italian

name, little known.

"A perfect likeness—perfect," says the Marchioness of Landport, dropping her eyeglass and making way for the German Ambassador. "That picture will simply be the making of the artist."

"The only reason," remarks Lord Sydney Tollemache, to whom her ladyship has addressed herself, "that induced Miss Calderon

to have it exhibited."

"Indeed? How do you know that?"

"From head-quarters—the artist himself. Why, commissions poured in upon him as soon as it was known that he was painting Miss Calderon."

"Of course. Will she be here to-day, I wonder?"

"Very likely. As I crossed the park I saw

her driving with Miss Morton."

"I dare say she will come then. By the way," added the Marchioness, taking Lord Sydney's arm and moving slowly away, "I hear you have an invitation from Mrs Gresham-Faulkner—shall you go?"

"Can you ask? Miss Calderon is likely to

be there."

"Take care, my lord; those moths will burn their wings who flutter round that candle. I don't think Vera Calderon has forgotten Sir Vivian Devereux."

Lord Sydney's pleasant face grows grave and thoughtful.

"How should she? Who could, who had once known him? He was a political opponent of mine, but I would give a good deal to hear him slash into my side from the Conservative benches."

"You never believed him guilty? Well, it was a very strange case. But, to return to Mrs Gresham-Faulkner; I can't make out exactly who or what she is. Miss Calderon goes to her assemblies and receives her—and yet, you know, she is not of the same set—is she?"

"N-no, can't say she is. Nor is Clinton Everest, altogether. Still, he is of a good Cumberland family, and his father was a political colleague of old Sir Randal Devereux's; but no one seems to know who this Mrs Gresham-Faulkner is, or who Gresham-Faulkner the husband was—if he is dead."

The Marchioness looks comically alarmed.

"My dear Lord Sydney, you frighten me! Still, Vera Calderon would never lend her countenance to an adventuress, and Mrs Gresham-Faulkner is not mauvais ton."

"Nevertheless," returns Lord Sydney, lifting hands clothed in the palest lemon kid, "there is a touch of the *Bohémienne* about her. She is wealthy, handsome, and, on dit, desirous to make a good match. Why should not I, who cannot win La Calderon, woo La Faulkner?"

"Pray do nothing of the sort!" exclaimed Lady Landport. "I declare—"

"What, my dear Marchioness?"

"I had half intended asking Vera Calderon to bring Mrs Gresham-Faulkner to my ball on the twenty-sixth; but I will not do it unless you promise me not to enrol yourself amongst her list of suitors."

"Have no fear, my dear Marchioness. Vera Calderon is as likely to marry Clinton Everest as I to offer my hand and heart to Mrs Gresham-Faulkner."

"Do you mean to say," says the Marchioness, "that the first idea has been canvassed?"

"What will not be canvassed at the club and five-o'clocks? He is certainly one of Miss Calderon's admirers. She does more than tolerate him; but the idea of such a woman even looking at Everest, or forgetting a man like Chandos-Devereux for him, is simply absurd. He, of course, would be delighted. He has little; he gains by only revolving round that Alcyone; and who would not jump to be the husband of the lady of Temple Rest and the trustee of the Chandos Royal estates?"

"I don't like him," says the Marchioness, shortly. "If Vera Calderon were not unlike everyone else—quite unique—I might marvel what she can find in him to endure in anything approaching the light of an admirer—suitor

one would think he would hardly dare to be, not two years after such a terrible tragedy as that which made Vivian Devereux a fugitive."

"Poor Vera Calderon!" says Lord Sydney, thoughtfully. "I have heard her called heartless for flinging herself into society. Heartless! Look at her face! If she is happy, then the Ancient Mariner was happy whose 'heart within him burned."

"It was a cruel fate," remarks Lady Landport; "and, while some temperaments seek relief in solitude, others must have action. She, you see, too, has all her life been used to action. She has been a traveller from her infancy; she never knew rest; and I am sure, if she had no other trouble, the care of that property would be enough, to say nothing of her own, to give her sleepless nights; yet they say she is a perfect woman of business, looks after things herself, and is beloved by the tenants. The mere thought of such responsibility would turn my hair grey. And her co-trustee still remains abroad."

"Yes; but Miss Morton told me the other day that Miss Calderon had heard from him, and that he was coming over very shortly within a fortnight, I believe."

"Indeed!" cries Lady Landport. "Dear me! He will be quite an acquisition. He is so singularly like Sir Vivian Devereux, you know. I am dring to see him. I wish one could hear something of Devereux. I dare not ask Miss Calderon any particulars. She must know; but no one else does."

"Sh—sh!" whispered some one near. "There she is!"

"Who? Where?" answers an eager voice.

"The beautiful Calderon. Has she a rival,

that you ask the question?"

Lady Landport turns quickly, and catches in the distance a glimpse of a figure in ruby velvet and grey cavalier hat and plumes, and she decides on the spot to obtain a similar costume for her daughter; for it is the fashion to copy Vera Calderon.

"This way," she says to her companion. "There are Vera Calderon and Florrie Morton

-Night and Morning."

"'She walks in beauty, like the night
Of cloudless climes and starry skies,
And all that's best of dark and bright
Meet in her aspect and her eyes,'"

quotes Lord Sydney. "Miss Calderon I mean, of course. She always makes me think of those lines."

"Yes, but Byron is old-fashioned. Recall something of Swinburne or Rossetti."

"My dear Marchioness, you forget! Is not the señorita a great admirer of Byron?" "So she is, and would not tell old Sir George Cranbourne which was her favourite poem, though he tried so hard to find out. Hush! Ah, there is Lady Constance Morton; and there, too, is Mr Everest!"





CHAPTER IX.

MRS GRESHAM-FAULKNER.

ERA CALDERON turned from the group that surrounded her to greet the Marchioness of Landport.

"I am so glad you are here," said the soft contralto voice. "I did not mean to have come, but Florrie dragged me with her."

No cavalier in Miss Calderon's train was more devoted to her than pretty Florrie Morton; and, dissimilar as the two girls were, a strong tie of friendship existed between them, the force and independence of Vera's character giving to her affection 'more of the elements of a man's love for a woman than of a woman's for one of her own sex.

"I wanted to see the picture," interposed Miss Morton; "and Vera declared I had enough of the original."

"That cannot be," said gallant Lord

Sydney; and Vera accepted the compliment

with complete indifference.

- "You had better go and look then, Florrie," she remarked, smiling a little. "No, Mr Everest,"—with graceful nonchalance,—"I saw you in the Park to-day, and I shall meet you to-morrow at the opera, I daresay. going to talk to Lady Landport now. Marchioness,"—passing her hand caressingly through her ladyship's arm—Vera had any and every manner at command, she was by nature versatile, and she had studied in a stern school for the last two years,—"there is room for one in my box, and I have not filled it up. Can you do it for me? You know my foreign ways; it need not be some one I know already, whether it be he or she."
- "He? Oh, fie, Miss Calderon! Then take pity on my nephew, Clem Willoughby; he is just home from India, and would be so delighted. But don't let me inflict a young hussar on you, if—"

"Dear Lady Landport, I cry you mercy! I am sure Mr—pardon me—what is his rank?"

"Only lieutenant at present."

"I am sure," Vera continued, bowing an acknowledgment of the information, "the 'young hussar' will not be an infliction."

"You get more sense out of young men than any woman I ever knew," said Lady Landport, frankly. "Clem was here half-anhour ago, raving over your portrait. My news will deprive him of what little brain he has! Thanks for your kindness. By-the-way, you will not disappoint me on the twenty-sixth? And I was going to ask you to bring Mrs Gresham-Faulkner with you."

"I shall be most happy," said Vera, without a change of countenance. "I dare say you

will like her-most people do."

"Will she be with you to-night?"
"No; Mrs Beauclerc and Florrie."

"I will find my nephew and introduce him to you," said the Marchioness. "And now, while I can keep you—and I see jealous eyes glaring this way—tell me, is it true what Lord Sydney declared to me, that Monsieur de Saint Léon is coming over at last?"

"I am not sure, Lady Landport. I hope so. I heard from him about three weeks ago. He

was then in Paris."

Everest came up at that moment and caught the last words.

"Was he not in the Austrian diplomatic service?" he said.

"Yes," Vera answered. "He went to Spain on some political mission, where he fell ill; but he returned to Vienna nearly a month ago, and would have been in England earlier if he had been able to come."

"I must try to secure him for my ball,"

said Lady Landport. "You must make him come, Miss Calderon."

"He will be valuable—he is remarkably handsome, this Spanish-French Count," put in Everest, quietly, "who is a naturalised Englishman, and cannot, I believe, speak English."

"Well, well, most of us can speak French—tant bien que mal," said the Marchioness, laughing. "And as for you, Miss Calderon, you are happier speaking French, or Italian, or

German, than English."

Others now came up to claim a share of Vera's attentions; and she made the handsome son of the Marquis of Landport happy for days by strolling through the rooms with him. She talked brilliantly, though not much; but no impartial onlooker could say she flirted, and she somehow prevented her companion from flirting. She would not take gallant speeches; she made them ridiculous by some graceful sarcasm or witty play on words, or coolly spoke of something else, as if she had not heard them. She gave no man encouragement; and yet, whenever she appeared, other women were comparatively deserted, and she reigned a queen in the midst of her courtiers.

"A lovely face," she said, answering her companion's comments on the portrait by Millais of a young viscountess; and, as the words left her lips, a feminine voice

exclaimed.-

"My dear Miss Calderon, self-praise—you know the proverb!"

Vera turned with well-bred languor; there was not a quiver of the lips, not a flash in the dark eyes, as she said, with that delicate accent which many young ladies tried in vain to imitate,—

"Some good angel, Mrs Gresham-Faulkner, must have whispered that you were near, and prompted my words. But allow me"—had the first part of her speech to the dashing widow been ironical or no? "Lord Lascelles—Mrs Gresham-Faulkner."

Mrs Gresham-Faulkner vouchsafed his lordship her brightest smile, which not a few thought very charming, while others declared that it seemed rather to flash across her face, like some external radiance, than to be lighted from within.

Mrs Gresham-Faulkner was a handsome woman, fair-haired, blue-eyed, with a still brilliant complexion—enhanced, it was whispered, by the arts of the toilet—and with small hands and feet, which she knew how to display to the best advantage. She dressed richly and tastefully; and few perhaps in society would have guessed her to be six-and-thirty. At home—alone—she was another being; but in the beau monde she was a dashing woman of the world, and among the superficial passed for an accomplished person.

After exchanging a few words with Lord Lascelles, she was turning away as Everest

approached, when Vera addressed her,—

"You will accompany Lady Constance Morton and me to Lady Landport's ball on the twenty-sixth?" she said. "The Marchioness asked if you would come."

"With the greatest pleasure, my dear. I am honoured. Ah! there is Mr Everest. Ta, ta!"

Lady Landport had gone in search of her nephew, and pounced on him as he stood before Vera's picture again.

"Clem," said she, tapping him on the shoulder, "come and be introduced to the

original."

The young man turned directly.

"What, Vera Calderon? By Jingo!"

"Hush! This way."

"Who is that dashing woman?" asked Clem, as Mrs Gresham-Faulkner swept past.

"Mrs Gresham-Faulkner—a friend of Miss

Calderon's."

" Friend!" repeated Clem-"of that glorious

creature? Impossible!"

"Well," said Lady Landport, "perhaps not a friend exactly, but Mrs Faulkner goes to Miss Calderon's balls and receptions in Carlton House Terrace, and Miss Calderon goes to Half-Moon Street."

"Half-Moon Street! Then this widow is

rich. Who is she?"

"No one knows. She came to London last season, when Miss Calderon was presented, and Miss Calderon was seen with her—in fact, introduced her to society. I fancy she met her abroad somewhere. She is certainly wealthy; but, without Vera Calderon's countenance, one might not be so ready to receive her, knowing really nothing of her. As it is, all doors are open to her. Now you know as much as I do, or any one else, except my lady herself, and, I suppose, Miss Calderon—and it is not easy to cross-question her. Here she is with that tiresome Lady Constance Morton."

Twenty minutes later Percy Everest was handing Vera into her carriage, for she had resigned Florrie to her mother, and was returning home alone.

"You receive to-morrow, do you not?" he

said, leaning on the carriage door.

"No," Vera answered; "I have put it off till next week. Madame Latouche is not well."

"Shall you be at home then?"

"I cannot tell. I may be out."

"You want to avoid me," said Everest, with a menacing look.

An almost grey shadow swept over the girl's face. She spoke with a kind of stony calmness.

"I don't want to avoid you. You must bear with me. You know how I am tried."

"Have I not been patient? Am I not so still?"

"And you must be—you must bear with me," said Vera, turning to him with a desperate look in her eyes which warned him not to try her too far. He fell back.

"Well," he said, sullenly, "I will call to-

morrow, and take my chance."

"I make no promise," returned Vera, relapsing into her stony manner. "Au revoir."

The carriage drove off. Then Vera pulled down the blinds and covered her face, shivering like a leaf, in the very agony of fierce

passion.

"When will this end?" she whispered, with set teeth. "O God! when will this end? It is killing me; and, but for him, I would bless every day that brought death nearer. Vivian, Vivian, it is for thy dear sake! Oh, to see thy face, to hear thy voice again, though the joy might be such unutterable anguish! Every word of love and trust is like fresh fuel to the consuming fire within me. But hush, hush!" She started up in terror. near home—this splendid mansion, of which he once spoke so mockingly! I must be stately Vera Calderon. I go to the opera to-night; I must not unnerve myself for my part.

The carriage stopped, the footman opened the door, and, graceful and self-possessed, the beautiful heiress passed into the hall among statues and flowers. But no soft Irish eyes looked tenderly into her face, no loving Irish voice uttered her name. Where was Aileen Connor? Why was she not with her darling in the London house, instead of thinking sadly of her as she sat at work in a tapestried chamber of Temple Rest?





CHAPTER X.

DIED IN EXILE.

HE opera was Faust, Patti was the Margherita, and the house was crowded. Many a lorgnette was directed to the box wherein sat

Vera Calderon in cream-white satin and sapphires—her favourite stones—sunnyfair-haired Florrie Morton by her side. Next to Florence was Mrs Beauclerc, a middle-aged dame, with a round good-humoured face; and on the other side of Vera sat Clem Willoughby, whose presence caused many an inquiry in the stalls and boxes as to who he was, while he was the envy of his own sex in his Elysian nook.

Everest was in the stalls, next to Lord Sydney Tollemache; and Vera saw them and bowed to them, returning the former's upward look with an indifferent glance that hardly appeared to see him. She found it more difficult than ever to give her attention either to her companions or to the opera on this night. Her mind would keep recurring to a strange, vague fancy that seemed to have taken possession of it ever since she had heard that Count Saint Léon was in Vienna. The fancy hardly reached the point of conjecture, yet sometimes it was so strong that her heart seemed to stand still, and then it throbbed with suffocating violence, so that it needed all her self-command to rouse herself to the necessities of the situation.

Just as the curtain was rising on the second act, she saw Everest—whose absence from the house she had noticed—returning to his stall with a newspaper in his hand. He glanced up at her box, as he took his place, with an expression that struck her like the sudden stab of a sharp weapon. For a moment she was absolutely deaf and blind, though no ordinary observer would have noticed any change in her; then she seemed to turn her eyes to the stage; but, under the shelter of her long lashes, she watched Everest. saw him show something in the paper to his companion, and she saw the sudden expression of amazement, half incredulous, wholly grieved, that flashed into Lord Sydney's face, and his quick furtive glance upwards to her box. She saw another man bend over from behind —it was Lord Lascelles—and the three whispered together; then some one cried "Hush!" and Everest hastily put the paper into his pocket, and settled his thin lips and folded his arms, with a look and gesture that spoke volumes to Vera, as he turned his apparent attention to the opera, from which, in truth, he never, under any circumstances, derived special pleasure; for he had neither taste for nor knowledge of music, and was almost equally indifferent to the dramatic art.

Vera sat motionless; and yet, when the curtain fell, she talked to her companions, and never suffered them to see the wild longing

within her for the close of the opera.

It came at last, and the aristocratic throng poured out into the crush-room. Lord Lascelles made his way to Vera's side, just as she was begging young Willoughby to escort Mrs Beauclerc to her carriage—for that dame was going to an assembly.

"Some one is sure to look after us, Mr Willoughby. Ah, here is Lord Lascelles! I shall see you again to-morrow at Mrs Dysart's; I will not forget the dance. Good-night."

"Have you seen? Have you heard?" said some one near, as Clem departed with his convoy, consoled for the penance by beautiful Miss Calderon's parting words.

"No. What—"

"It's in the evening papers. I heard it said that—"

"I will get some one to bring up your carriage, Miss Calderon," said Lord Lascelles, in a voice raised above the necessary pitch, and with an angry glance round.

Vera lifted her eyes to his with a steady,

grateful look.

"Thank you, my lord," she said, quietly.

"There is Mr Manningham; he will go."

Lord Lascelles stepped forward; but a group intervened before he could reach the object he sought, and he touched Everest, who was close by, and gave him the commission. Everest went out, and in a few moments succeeded in bringing Vera's carriage up; and Lord Lascelles, whose feverish anxiety to get his charges out of the operahouse the one for whom he was specially concerned saw easily, hurried Miss Calderon forwards.

They halted on the steps, a crowd behind, around, outside, coachmen and policemen shouting. Lord Lascelles shuddered as he looked at Vera standing there in the bright, noisy scene of the life of fashion, the jewels she wore flashing subdued fire through the costly lace gracefully disposed about her head and shoulders. She saw his look, she saw the looks of many others too—not looks of admiration only, but something else, expressing that sense of terrible contrast; yet still she was stately and self-possessed.

The perfectly appointed brougham drew up in rank.

"Miss Calderon's carriage!" sang out the voice of the policeman, as Everest sprang up the steps; and at that moment a shrill voice rose above the tumult, and a ragged boy pushed his way in among the group of loungers.

"Speshl edishun Echo! Death of Sir

Vivian Deveroo'! 'Ere y'are, sir!"

There was a scream from within, from Florrie Morton, and a fierce irrepressible oath from Lord Lascelles. Vera staggered, and laid a convulsive grasp on her companion's arm.

"This way," he said, hurriedly. "I had feared this, Miss Calderon. It is a mere rumour, I believe—nothing more."

She had recovered herself before even those

hastily-spoken words were finished.

"Pardon me," she said, in a low voice, "it was only momentary. Florrie"—laying her firm hand on Miss Morton's wrist—"no fainting or nonsense here. Mr Everest, you have a paper. Please give it me."

She took Lord Lascelles' arm and passed on to her carriage, the little crowd falling back

respectfully.

Florrie Morton, trembling, strongly agitated, was half lifted into the carriage; Lord Lascelles handed Vera in, and she thanked him

more by look than word for his kind thought for her.

"The paper," she said to Everest. "Give it to me."

. He stepped forward, and, as he placed it in her hand, he whispered,—

"Do you doubt the news?"

"I believe nothing on a first hearing," she

answered. "Good-night."

The carriage drove off, and Vera bent over the paper, and read the few lines that might wreck her life or bring an answer to her longing to see Vivian Devereux once more,—

"A rumour was current in Paris to-day, and found general credence, though on what authority we cannot say, that Sir Vivian Chandos-Devereux died a few days ago, at an obscure village in Andalusia, of malignant fever, and was interred in unconsecrated ground. On inquiring at the Hotel du Louvre, where Sir Vivian's cousin, M. de Saint Léon, is at present staying, it was ascertained that he had no further knowledge than the rumour mentioned."

The paper fell from Vera's hands. Florrie crept up to her and clasped her arms about her.

"It isn't true, Vera," she whispered. "Oh, it can't be true!"

Was she who suffered most to be the consoler? She tenderly kissed Florrie's fair forehead.

"I will not believe it," she said; "I will hope. You must not give way, Florrie, dear.

Try to believe the best."

Did she believe the best, as she paced her room in the still hours of the dawn. Could this awful rumour be true? Was the close of Vivian Devereux's cruel exile a nameless, dishonoured grave in a foreign land, or dared she give form to her wild hope? Was it Rafael de Rohan who had died? Had Vivian Devereux braved discovery in the assumed identity of the cousin he so closely resembled? She knew his daring spirit; and to him, whose foreign characteristics and facility in foreign tongues had served to intensify his brother's animosity, the assumption of a Franco-Spanish gentleman could present no difficulties. had all the power of acting needed for such a He would have obtained the data from his cousin. Rafael de Saint Léon had been in ill-health — Vivian Devereux had never known an hour's illness; the very boldness of the scheme would commend itself to Vivian's mind and be a safeguard against discovery. Who would dream of suspecting the fugitive lord of Chandos-Devereux in the French diplomat, whose striking likeness to the exile, while it rendered disguise easy, would further tend to disarm suspicion; for comparatively trivial differences confuse the memory. Again, Vivian was less known in London than in Paris and Vienna. If he passed the ordeal in those cities, who could discover him in London?

The girl's brain ached with thought, and her heart grew sick and beat wildly with alternations of despair and hope—hope that, if realised, would bring dread and suffering. If Vivian had died, why had not Alphonse come to her or written? She had compared the letter received from Count Saint Léon with Vivian's letters, and with the former letters of Saint Léon; but the likeness between the writing of the first and of the last was exact. Nevertheless she could not cast aside the idea that Vivian Devereux still lived, and lived under the identity of his cousin Saint Léon.





CHAPTER XI.

ARMED PEACE.

OU are still, then, sceptical as to this rumour in the papers?" said Percy Everest, leaning on the piano in Vera's drawing-room,

while her fingers wandered idly over the keys. It was the day before Lady Landport's ball—nearly three weeks after the rumour of Vivian Devereux's death had first startled the world, and no confirmatory evidence had appeared, though two or three foreign journals of repute had said that there seemed to be some foundation for the report.

Vera glanced carelessly at the speaker.

"I have told you before that I never trust to a mere rumour. You show me the *Indépendance Belge*; but what does that say? Newspapers are not oracles, though they claim an oracle's repute."

Everest's brow darkened.

"The wish," he said, "is father to the

thought."

"You are wrong. I am not of a hopeful nature; if I had been, stern realities would have changed me. I simply doubt what I cannot see any ground for believing; or, rather, my mind is a blank. I await further evidence."

She began one of Mendelssohn's Lieder. Everest watched her for a few moments in silence. Then he spoke again,—

"Vera, I do not know why I should postpone what I have to say to you—what I

called to-day indeed to say."

The girl dropped her hands from the keys and turned to him.

"Well," she said, quietly, "I am ready to listen."

He called her "Vera"—this man who was Vivian Devereux's enemy—who had insulted him in the hour of his humiliation—and Vivian Devereux's betrothed wife saw nothing strange in it!

Everest leaned forward a little.

"If Chandos-Devereux is dead," he said, slowly, "as I, for my part, believe he is, society will make demands upon you and upon me which I shall not wish you to disregard, nor will I disregard them myself; but I warn you that, at the end of such time as custom prescribes for retirement from society, I shall

claim—not your promise, for you never gave one—but the fulfilment of your destiny—if you choose to put it so."

He paused as Vera rose and leaned against the piano, with a face icily calm; but she signed to him to go on, and he continued,—

"I do not pretend to love you. I speak frankly, as I have done all along; marriage between you and me will be a bargain. I gain wealth, position, influence; you gain—silence."

She did not seem moved; she did not even glance at him. She spoke in a measured,

mechanical kind of way.

"Why say this now? You know why I—to the world at any rate—refuse to accept as truthful, so long as I can fairly maintain a show of scepticism, a report that would compel me to withdraw from society. You think that in my inmost heart I believe Vivian Devereux dead. Yet, before the grass is green above his nameless grave, you come to me and tell me that I must give you my hand." She could not say, "be your wife." "Is this needful? Can you not spare me such language for one month at least?"

Everest folded his arms and looked at her.

"I have spared you for nearly two years," he said, "and I spare you still. Yet I have power to say, 'in a month—a week from hence—be my wife,' have I not?"

" No."

She said that one word in the same manner, and, turning, met his amazed look with one so steadfast, so penetrating, so proudly conscious of something, some force within her that he could not utterly master, that he drew back and stood quite still, overwhelmed by her calm strength as he had once been by her passion.

"Is it war?" he said, presently, under his breath, with a fierce glitter in his light eyes.

"No, not war," Vera answered, without a change in look or mien; "but, for the present, armed peace. If you conquer in the end, you can give a little rope meanwhile, cannot you?"

"Ay, but I warn you, Vera, not to imagine that time will work any change in me. I am playing for too high a stake to yield to any thought of mercy, to look back one moment from the plough to which I have put my hand. Vengeance may be satisfied, but not ambition. You know what I owed the House of Devereux, what took me to Chandos Royal. That haughty house has drunk the bitter cup to the dregs. Its last representative—the man who told me he would horsewhip me like a dog—has died alone, an exile, dishonoured, disgraced. He promised me, when I greeted him by his new title, to repay me not in word, but in deed. How and when will he keep that promise?"

He seemed beside himself in his savage

triumph, and, as he spoke the last words, came near to Vera, as though he would lay his hand on her arm. Till now she had heard him with a face like the face of the rack-tortured, pale with an ashen pallor, locked in the stern resolve to endure in silence; but now she recoiled suddenly, with a look of such ineffable horror and scorn as he never forgot.

"Do not touch me," she said, in a low tone—and her eyes were like the eyes of the lion at bay, at once fierce and desperate,—"do not touch me, lest I brave all, fling all to the winds, and stand free from your accursed toils! Nothing could make my life a blacker waste of misery than it is now. Silence! I have heard enough. Leave me!"

Everest turned slowly. Something of actual fear had crept into his face. Once again he had gone too far; he had calculated too much on his own power, too little on the strength of his victim's character and will. He obeyed her; he did not utter another word, but silently passed out of the room and quitted the house.

Once more alone, the unfortunate girl pressed her hands to her brow like one distracted.

"I shall go mad!" she said. "This cannot last! My very brain almost reels sometimes. I shall not die; but I shall go mad! God help me! What can I do?"

She wrung the slight hands, all sparkling

with gems, and paced to and fro—to and fro, as she had done, alas, how often! in fearful excitement!

"Some thread in this terrible network must break," her despairing thoughts ran. "If Count Saint Léon be Vivian Devereux, how can I answer him when he asks how it is that Percy Everest is among my favoured guests? How long will he remain ignorant of the fact that Mrs Gresham-Faulkner belongs to another place in society than mine? Not an hour—not ten minutes. If he should be at this ball, he will see her, and that will be enough. I may lie to him—and he will believe it, because I say it—tell him that I am under obligations to her, that she has saved a friend's life—anything! but no lies would cover a friendship with Clinton Everest."

And then came the whisper, "What if it be not Vivian Devereux, but Rafael de Saint Léon? What if Vivian Devereux has died, as they say?" She flung out her hands as if the thought had been a tangible foe.

"No, no, no! I cannot, will not believe that. If there is justice in Heaven, it cannot be! Vivian, I shall see thee once again. Would to God that I could kneel at thy feet and tell thee all, and die! For we can only meet to part!"

Hapless Vera Calderon! Who that could have seen her now would have envied her in her

splendid misery? She moved on velvet pile, among pictures and statues and flowers and books and music—all that wealth and cultured taste could purchase; yet the beggar who received her bounty—so freely given—would scarce have changed places with her if he could have seen her now, unmasked and alone.





CHAPTER XII.

" HOPE LIFTED, DOUBT DEPRESSED."

"T is a very grand affair, is it not, this ball at Lady Landport's?" said Mrs Gresham-Faulkner, as she stepped into Vera's carriage, which had called for her, and settled her rich satin and laces to her satisfaction. "The Austrian Ambassador, I hear, will be there, and that famous Lord Fordington whom all the world raves about."

"And dukes and earls ad libitum," said Vera, with an irony in look and tone that the other felt, but could not exactly resent. That speech of hers jarred on Miss Calderon; it was not exactly vulgar, but it showed lack of ton.

Mrs Gresham-Faulkner eyed the heiress's dress, and was silent during the short drive from Half-Moon Street to Lord Landport's mansion opposite the Green Park, and Verawas not likely to break that silence.

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She was thinking of Count Saint Léon. He would not be there to-night; he was not in England. Was she best pleased not to meet him first in this great assembly, or was she anxious—still with that strong impression on her that the name was but an assumed one—that he should see and be seen by those who had known him, and at once put London to the test already successful in Vienna and Paris? She hardly knew herself which feeling predominated in her mind.

A glittering throng filled the noble saloons of the Landport mansion. One met there the *elite* of the magic circle called society—not merely, too, those whom birth and wealth have placed in the van, but men and women whose fame had opened to them the doors of a world ever ready to welcome genuine talent. Among the soberly-attired cavaliers was a sprinkling of foreign officers and diplomatists in rich uniforms, and wearing the stars and ribbons of almost every known order of merit.

"The freshest, the fairest, The richest, the rarest"

flowers of fashion and intellect were there; but, when Vera Calderon's name was announced, there was an instant murmur and an involuntary movement in the direction of the door.

Women said that she was always splendidly

dressed, men said that she was always the bestdressed woman in the room—for she was like a picture, and not a fashion print; but in truth, Vera made the simplest robes look rich. To-night she wore cream white and diamonds.

"I half thought she might not come," was whispered; "evidently she does not believe the rumour about Sir Vivian, which was re-

peated only a few days ago."

"Well, Miss Morton is here too," remarked Lord Sydney Tollemache, — "she came half-an-hour ago with Lady Constance; but I suppose they take their cue from Miss Calderon."

"Of course," responded an attaché of the Austrian Embassy, who spoke English nearly as well as Lord Sydney. "Himmel, my lord, how completely Miss Calderon 'kills' Mrs Gresham-Faulkner!" And then he asked, "Do you like that lady?"

"No," said Lord Sydney, decidedly; "can't say I do—nor Mr Everest either," he added, as that gentleman approached Vera and said a

few words to her.

"Jealous, eh?" said the Austrian, smiling.

"Not in the least. I don't aspire; and, if Everest does, all I can say is, he's a presuming puppy."

"Well, well," said the attaché, "he will not dissipate the vision of Sir Vivian—but

some one else might."

"Who?" asked Lord Sydney, quickly.

"The co-trustee, mon cher; Sir Vivian's cousin, Saint Léon."

"Is he so very like Devereux?"

"Very. I had hoped Saint Léon would be here to-night; but I suppose we must give him up. The Ambassador, too, is non est."

"Strange for a Frenchman to enter the

Austrian service!" said Lord Sydney.

"Whom could he serve? He is a Rohan—detests the Bonapartes—a strong Legitimist; he has a talent for diplomacy. Where exercise it? But come, let us join the stars that revolve round the sun;" and the two gentlemen moved away towards the group round Vera.

"I am so sorry," said Lady Landport presently to Vera; "Count Zendorff promised to be in good time, and I am half afraid he will not come."

"Perhaps," answered Vera, smiling a little, "M. de Saint Léon has arrived after all, and that has detained him."

"Oh, I hope so; for then perhaps Zendorff

would bring the Count with him!"

Vera's speech had been a rehearsal; she wanted to test her own powers of dissimulation, and she was satisfied with the result. She had not changed countenance, not a muscle had quivered; her smile was easy and

natural, her voice steady; if Count Saint Léon came—if she should look once more on Vivian Devereux's face—she would not betray herself. If she showed any agitation, it would be no more than would be attributed to the likeness between the fugitive lord of Chandos-Devereux and his foreign cousin.

The Prince von Epstein, second cousin to a crowned head, secured the beautiful heiress for the first quadrille. Mrs Gresham was led out by Lord Lascelles, to whom she endeavoured to make herself very fascinating, but who secretly made up his mind not to ask her to dance again, and wondered to himself what had induced him to ask her at all.

As she sat fanning herself, while her partner went to fetch her an ice, Percy Everest came up, and, bending down, whispered,—

" Well, Adeline, are you happy?"

She glanced up at him—behind the shelter of her fan — with an expression strangely, startlingly different from that which her face had worn a moment before.

"Happy?" she said. "No, not yet. I never shall be, as some count happiness."

"Pooh! How many here are? You are better off than I am."

"That is partly your own fault," said the lady, glancing across to where Vera stood. "Why do you let her play with you?"

"Let her! I threatened her the other

day, and she turned on me like a stag at

bay."

"Bravado!" returned MrsGresham-Faulkner.

"She dare not really drive you to extremities; for, though you keep from me the secret of your power, it must be great to awe Vera Calderon."

"You do not know her, Adeline. She cannot defy me now certainly,—now that Vivian Devereux is dead; but, as long as he lived, I tell you I almost believe she would have braved everything rather than become my wife. I cannot fathom her — cannot understand her; nor can you. But she loved that man as women love in plays and romances."

"And hates you as women hate in plays and romances," added Adeline Gresham-Faulkner, fanning herself again. "But she must yield in the end. However, of course, society exacts some show of forbearance on your part for a time; for Miss Calderon could not marry Percy Everest within a few months of Sir Vivian Devereux's death, even under the most favourable circumstances."

"No," said Everest, gloomily; and, as Lord Lascelles now approached, he moved away.

Vera Calderon, leaning on the arm of Prince von Epstein, was wandering through the conservatory and speaking to him in German as perfect as his own. She had refused to engage

herself for the next dance. Once or twice during the last the conflict of feeling within her had made her almost dizzy; and even now among the flowers, temporarily free from the glare and the crowd, her heart still throbbed wildly, and more than once the thought, "What if, after all, I am dazzling my eyes with a chimera—what if, after all, Vivian is dead?" came to her with such terrible force that she hurried into some light, careless speech, or picked the flowers of her bouquet with a quick restless hand, scattering them on the ground, as though by the sound of her own voice she could drown the voice within her, or by action dissipate the anguish of dread and suspense.

"What a pity! Do not suffer those flowers to be trampled by careless feet," said the

Prince.

"Why not?" she said, laughing a little, and pulling out a tea-rose even as she spoke. "It is an allegory, Herr Prince, such as one reads in the poems scribbled in ladies' albums."

"Dii avertite omen!" said the Prince, stretching forth a pleading hand for the rose.

Vera laughed again, and resigned it, turning anxious, wistful eyes to the splendid vista before her; and her hand grasped nervously the jewelled fan, and then she flung down a bunch of maiden-hair fern, and put her foot upon it.

Why had her heart leaped up with so wild

a throb, and then sunk like lead? The movement she had noticed among the crowd was only because another quadrille was forming; but to her companion her action seemed like a scornful answer to his remonstrance.

"I dare not ask you, Fräulein," he said, reproachfully, "after this, to place the rose you gave me." They had known each other well in

Vienna.

"I answered my own thoughts, Herr Prince," said the girl, quickly. "Pardon." She took the rose and placed it in his button-hole, with a half-nonchalant grace, adding, "I did not give it—I only let you save it."

"Why try to rob the gift of its value, Fräu-

lein? But you cannot succeed."

"You are easily pleased, Herr Prince. Cannot you write some verses about the one flower rescued from the ruins of its fellows, or some nonsense of that kind?"

"Fräulein, I do not write poetry, but I can

sing 'Rose, wie bist du.'"

"Here, and now? Well then," said the girl, "let us have the orchestra play the accompaniment; they are tuning up for the Lancers. But who shall sing a lament for the crushed flowers? Shall I?"

The Prince looked at her; he was puzzled, as well he might be; but, before he could speak again, Vera drew back suddenly from the entrance, which they had now reached, and

said, in an altered manner, in a low hurried tone—

"What is the matter? Who is it? They are all pressing forward—the band has ceased."

"Some grandee," said the Prince, trying, but in vain, to catch sight among the throng of the new-comer—"the Austrian Ambassador, perhaps."

Vera stood motionless.

"Who is it? Who is it?" was repeated.

Then some one forced his way through the crowd, and came up to Vera, just as her companion was proposing that they should go forward and see what the stir was about.

"Ah, Miss Calderon!" said Lord Lascelles.
"Lady Landport is coming this way. The Austrian Ambassador has this moment arrived and M. de Saint Léon is with him."





CHAPTER XIII.

COUNT SAINT LÉON.

DE SAINT LÉON is with him."

What did those seven words
mean for Vera Calderon? Did they
condense the whole volume of her

past and future? or did they only mean that in another moment she would meet a stranger, whose face, so like Vivian Devereux's, she had never beheld?

She had advanced a few steps into the ball-room, and, bowing in response to Lord Lascelles' announcement, paused and stood waiting. She saw, while her eyes sought for one form only, the crowd around, and she saw others beyond pressing forward; she saw Mrs. Gresham-Faulkner and Percy Everest among them; she knew that every one in the crowded room would be watching her and Count Saint Léon—watching for this meeting. She actually held her breath; her heart stood still in

the agony of hope, suspense, dread; every function of sentient existence seemed suspended; her whole life was gathered into a focus; all that was happening around her was seen and heard with a terrible distinctness, and she knew that she must bring to bear in this brief space of time every power of self-control; and yet there was but one being for her among all these men and women. Outwardly she stood, a picture in her mournful Spanish beauty, gleaming satin and falling lace, against the background of green and crimson, calm and stately—the calm of some Southern summer day, when the breathless air seems charged with suspense, and close, too close, beneath the earth's surface the volcanic fires burn fiercely.

The guests gave way. Vera Calderon saw Lady Landport advancing towards her, and beside her a tall slight man in a splendid uniform, rich in colour, glittering with jewelled orders. A murmur ran through the crowd, and Vera heard Prince von Epstein whisper to Lord Lascelles. "How like Sir Vivian he is!"

He—Saint Léon—had been bending down to his companion, so that his face was partly concealed. He was before Vera now; Lady Landport was saying—

"Allow me to have the pleasure—Miss Calderon, Count Saint Léon—Monsieur le Comte,

Mademoiselle Calderon."

Saint Léon lifted his handsome face. There was the dark olive complexion, the black wavy hair of the picture at Chandos Royal, though now the drooping moustache all but hid the mouth; the eyes—they met Vera's for one second—Vivian Devereux!

There was a blank; for a moment the girl's brain reeled. The hum of voices swelled into a roar; there was a mist before her, flecked with shifting colours and bright rays from objects that flashed and scintillated.

"I am so happy in meeting Mademoiselle Calderon, to whom indeed I feel as though I had already the honour of being known."

The sweet softly-modulated voice thrilled Disguised as it was, it could to her heart. not have deceived her; but so calmly he spoke those graceful words in the polite Gallic tongue that suspicion itself must have been disarmed. Emotion there was, but only such emotion as became Count Saint Léon, meeting his cousin's betrothed wife, knowing that this first interview with him must be painful to Who could have read more than this in the slight quiver of the musical tones, in the blended reverence and admiration of the momentary look that rested on the face before him? Who, if the thought had presented itself that Vivian Devereux was one and identical with Rafael Saint Léon, could believe that in the supreme crisis he could preserve the assumption so perfectly as not

in some manner to betray himself?

Did he, as he spoke, recall that night when the Giaour had bowed before Leila in the halls of Chandos-Devereux? The whole world was at his feet then; one thing only he had lacked—and that face and form of Leila had filled the vacancy. Now, a proscribed criminal, he met the one love of his life as a stranger.

The very depth of anguish, the fierce force of conflicting feeling within Vera, helped the power of will that enabled her to regain her self-control, and reply quietly to the Count's greeting.

"Indeed, M. de Saint Léon," she said, "the pleasure of meeting is reciprocal. I had

not hoped to see you to-night."

She did not offer her hand. This was but a cold greeting for one so nearly related to Vivian Devereux—whom he had loved and trusted—with whom she was associated in the fulfilment of a sacred trust. But was it not natural that, in a moment fraught, of necessity, with such bitter pain, she should ensure self-command by an excess of reserve?

The Count understood this; for he only bowed again, and drew back a little, making way for the Austrian Ambassador, who just then came up. Adeline Gresham - Faulkner turned to

Everest, who stood near her.

"Well," she said, in a whisper, glancing at the Count and then at Vera, "do you fear him?"

"Fear him? No. He may have influence; I have power. Besides she will not forget Devereux."

"Hem! You think the likeness will only bring the other too vividly before her. May it not have another effect? I have read of such things in romance. Do they never happen in real life?"

"I have power," repeated Everest; and he turned away and asked the Austrian attaché, to whom he was slightly known, to introduce

him to M. de Saint Léon.

He was anxious to discover if the Count was acquainted with his name. Vivian Devereux had surely seen his cousin in his exile, and had spoken to him of Clinton Everest. If so, he had good reason to fear the newcomer; he would know the truth quickly.

"As soon as I can, mon cher," said the attaché. "He is surrounded just at present. Parbleu! how nobly Miss Calderon received him—and it must have been a terrible trial to her! He is so wonderfully like Chandos-Devereux."

"Did you know him well?"

"Oh, no! I only met him in Vienna last

month, when he came back from Spain. I knew Devereux slightly. Every one liked him in Vienna. He was a vast favourite, and no wonder. I can't think that rumour of his death has any solid foundation. Miss Calderon's doubting it is not perhaps so much; but Saint Léon cannot believe it, or he would hardly be here to-night."

"I am afraid, nevertheless, that it is true," said Everest, sighing; and he looked again at the handsome Frenchman, who was standing at a little distance, with a distinguished group around him; and once he thought the Count looked his way; but then he would not know

him by sight.

Vera, leaning on the Austrian Ambassador's arm, passed the spot where Lady Constance Morton and Florrie sat waiting for the forming of the set which the unexpected appearance of the distinguished foreigners had interrupted. Gracefully excusing herself for a moment, Vera approached the two ladies.

"Shall I introduce M. de Saint Léon to you?" she asked; "or"—quickly, seeing the tears in Florrie's eyes—"would you rather not?"

"Not now—not to me," pleaded Florrie, hurriedly. "I should be afraid of myself."

"I understand," said Vera, in a low voice.

"It is so trying; he is so like. I thought I must have fainted when I first saw him," added Lady Constance, fanning herself in an agitated manner.

Yet she, whose torture was beyond all power of speech, was so calm! When would

this evening come to a close?

Saint Léon did not join the dancers; and he saw that Vera was not among them. caught a glimpse of her as she sat near the conservatory, and carelessly asked the Prince von Epstein who it was who was bending over her: and when he was answered that it was Lord Lascelles, who seemed "beaucoup épris," he answered, "that was no matter for wonder." At another time he would have smiled to think that he knew Lord Lascelles much better than his informant did: that he had rowed with him at Oxford, and lounged with him at the Carlton and the Travellers'; but now what thought could raise a smile to his lips? He was living, like Vera, a life of agony in these hours.

Every one was anxious to be introduced to the brilliant foreigner, to whom attached of necessity so keen an interest, from his unique position. Among the eager crowd was Percy Everest, whom the young attaché presently

led up to the group.

"M. de Saint Léon," said he, "permettezmoi—Mr Percy Everest, Monsieur le Comte de Saint Léon."

The Count turned, gave Mr Everest a quick,

keen look, without a shadow of recognition in it, and bowed, uttering a few words in French, among which was an expression of regret that he spoke no English, though he understood a little. Everest's heart bounded within him. He felt that he was safe. Vivian Devereux had either had no communication with his cousin or had never mentioned Everest to him. The name was evidently unknown to He answered laughingly, the Frenchman. that, though M. de Saint Léon would not mistake him for a countryman, yet he found no difficulty in conversing in the "polite tongue;" and indeed, like many Canadians, he spoke French well, and if, as he had said, it lacked the "je ne sais quoi" which proclaims the "son of the soil," it merited the compliments of the courtly diplomatist.

Mrs Gresham-Faulkner had excused herself from this quadrille; she had a purpose in view; and, presently dismissing her cavalier, she approached Prince von Epstein and tapped

him with her fan.

"Prince, M. de Saint Léon has been presented to you. I adore celebrities. Pray

present him."

Vera, from her distant sofa, saw the byplay, and her heart grew sick; yet she smiled at what Lord Lascelles was saying, and answered him à propos. The Prince bowed, and went to fetch Saint Léon. M. de Saint

Léon bowed, and would be "most happy." Inwardly he had asked himself who the lady was, who—one glance of his critical eye had assured him—was not precisely haut ton.

The Count was introduced, and Mrs Gresham-Faulkner scanned his striking countenance

somewhat boldly.

"So you speak no English?" said she, in her most sprightly manner, seating herself in a chair, and leaving the Count no choice in courtesy but to enter into conversation with her.

He stood by, resting his hand on the back of the chair, a position which Mrs Gresham-Faulkner rather liked, as it enabled her to look up in an arch and innocent manner into his face. He answered her question with a slight bow, but without a smile, in French.

"Unfortunately, madame, I do not speak

English, but I understand it fairly well."

"Ah, well," responded the lady, "I daresay I can talk French better than you can understand English; and you will bear with my failings?"

She spoke very tolerable French, and Saint

Léon replied,—

"Madame has no need of my forbearance.

She speaks my language excellently."

"Ah, you foreigners!" cried the fair widow, shaking her head. "You always tell people they speak your language well. I wish in-

deed I deserved the compliment. You leave nothing more to say of Miss Calderon's French, which is really that of a native."

"Ah, but then she has lived abroad nearly

all her life!"

"Yes; and you could discern that in a minute. She is not English in her ways. I often tell her I wonder she lives in England, since she seems to like Italy and Germany so much better," said the widow, waving her handsome fan backwards and forwards as she conveyed to the Count the information she was anxious he should possess—that she was on friendly terms with the most famous woman in society.

She was not looking up then, and so did not see the sudden flash in the dark hazel eyes, and the silky moustache hid the lips that were sharply compressed. Was the woman simply boasting? What had Vera Calderon in common with her? He would know more.

"You are acquainted, then, with Mademoiselle Calderon?" he said, not suffering the slightest shade of surprise to tinge his soft voice.

"Acquainted! I may say more—I claim intimacy. I came to-night in her carriage. I am so fond of her! She is a wonderfully fascinating woman."

She leaned back and looked up smiling-she

wanted to see how the Count would take her information; but the Count's grave and haughty face was impenetrable. He merely replied, glancing round carelessly,—

"She is beautiful and gifted; she cannot be

other than fascinating."

"Too much so for many people's peace of mind," said Mrs Gresham-Faulkner, slowly. "And yet she is unapproachable. But I admire her for it."

"Mademoiselle Calderon is greatly honoured by madame's sympathy and admiration," said Count Saint Léon, with a touch of sarcasm that brought a flush to the woman's face.

She saw she had been guilty of a grievous

mistake, and hastened to make amends.

"Pardon!" she said, in a low tone, "if I have ventured to draw near to a subject so—" she faltered—" so painful. I spoke as a friend of Miss Calderon—to one also her friend. Indeed you must forgive me."

Friend!—this coquettish hypocrite, acting a part before him, a friend of Vera's! Was he dreaming? She could not dare to be uttering an untruth of which a word from Vera's own

lips would convict her.

"Madame has no need," he said, with chilling courtesy, but still with irony, "to ask pardon for giving play to the most charming attributes of her sex. The rather must I crave forgiveness, and would even be

so bold as to assume it granted, and ask the honour of madame's hand, but that I do not join the dancers to-night—and, I see madame's partner approaching;" and, bowing gracefully, he moved away, leaving Mrs Gresham-Faulkner sorely perplexed as to whether he was in earnest in any part of his speech, or held her in contempt.

"Rohan to the core!" she said to herself, while her lips smiled, and her eyes followed the tall receding form. "There is pride enough in the mingled blood of Rohan and Guzman-Meridia, without the added Devereux pride. Vivian Devereux himself was not more

haughty than his cousin."

"Will you not be persuaded?" asked Lord Lascelles of Vera. "Only one more

dance!"

"My lord, will you take a promise for another evening and excuse me now? I meant to stay only for a little while, and ordered my carriage to call for me early. I have outstayed my intended time."

"And you are indeed going?" said the

young man. His face fell.

"Don't make me seem hard-hearted," said the girl, with that mingling of lightness and sadness which often appeared in her manner, and lent to it such a subtle charm. "You will make me fear to ask you a favour, lest I should add insult to injury." "You know, Miss Calderon, how gladly I

would do you a thousand favours!"

"Yes, I know," she said, gravely. This man's devotion touched her deeply; it was so unsullied, so free from the hope of reward. "Then, my lord, will you kindly ask M. de Saint Léon to come to me? He is in the next room, I think."

"You honour me too much," said Lord

Lascelles, as he departed with alacrity.

For a few brief moments Vera was alone. The band was playing one of Strauss's waltzes; the dancers were whirling in clouds of lace and silk and flashing jewels before her; and she—still wearing the mask—sat waiting for Vivian Devereux, with a heart almost fainting within her from the fearful tension kept up so long.

She dared not lift her eyes to his face when he came up. He saw it, and saw the struggle for self-command. What change in her, how-

ever slight, could escape him?

"Mademoiselle has honoured me?" he said, pausing.

The girl rose.

"Yes," she said, mastering herself now. "I am going to leave, and I wanted to speak to you a moment, Monsieur de Saint Léon. Can you call on me to-morrow morning? Shall I say at ten o'clock?"

"I shall not fail," said Saint Léon, quietly.

"Shall I have the honour to escort you to your carriage?"

Vera bowed her head, and placed her hand She could not have spoken then.

Saint Léon led her to the card-room, which was deserted now, and went to fetch her opera-She stood calm and motionless while cloak. he was away; and, when he returned, gave only a fleeting glance at his face.

white to the lips.

Without uttering one word, Saint Léon placed the mantle over her shoulders—the play must be acted out-for, though they were alone now, there was no security against intrusion; and so there was nothing in his manner that would not have befitted Count Saint Then he led her out to the carriage. But, as he opened the door, she loosed her hand from his arm, and stepped hastily into the brougham.

He understood her: he saw how trembled, now that there was no one save him She turned to him, meaning still to see her. to utter such words of farewell as Vera Calderon should utter to Count Saint Léon: but she could not speak. Her eyes met hisonly for a moment—yet in that moment the mask was torn away. A mist swept over her -was it Vivian indeed, or only a vision bright and fleeting? It was his hand that clasped hers—his lips that pressed on it one burning, passionate kiss; and then she was crouching like a stricken thing on the carriage cushions, tossed in a fierce passion of wild happiness and misery that made her tremble for reason itself;—alone—fearfully alone—in a torment that his very love made sharper; yet never alone, for he was with her now!

To-morrow—yes, to-morrow—was it true?
—she stood in her dressing-room, pressing her hands over her eyes—he would hold her in his arms—he would speak to her. It was true. Dreaming? No, no; her hand still felt the clasp of his, the touch of his lips; and yet, oh, with what depth of despairing grief she wrung those clenched hands above her head, and the old miserable cry burst forth again: "Oh, Vivian, my life, my life! Would to God I had never seen thy face! Oh, for one day—one hour of oblivion!"





CHAPTER XIV.

"OH, LOVE, MY LOVE, YOU ARE HERE!"

ERA CALDERON had always adhered to her traveller's habit of early hours; and, the morning after Lady Landport's ball, she came into the breakfast-room at her usual time, though on this occasion the meal was a farce. She forced herself to drink a little coffee, but could do no more. Vera was alone. and was best pleased to be so. Madame Latouche never made her appearance till past nine at the earliest. Her presence in the house was a necessary sacrifice to les convenances, and she herself, an accomplished woman, the widow of a Frenchman of birth and some rank, was kind and warm hearted, and a woman of tact; but Vera shrank now from even a look of inquiry—shrank still more from the-to her courteous and unselfish naturenecessity of entering into a conversation in

which every word uttered would be an effort.

It was her wont to pass the first three and often four hours of the morning in the library, where she devoted herself entirely to the business devolving upon her in her onerous position. But she could not attend to business now; she went to her boudoir, first telling a footman to show Monsieur de Saint Léon, when he came, to the library.

How she counted the minutes to the hour she longed for with such unspeakable yearning, and yet dreaded with such unspeakable dread! How, for the ten thousandth time, her thoughts traversed the field of time, from her first meeting with Vivian Devereux till now! How vividly present to her was that night when she had turned at Lady Constance's words, and started involuntarily when she saw that by chance coincidence the young lord of Rougement were the costume of the Giaour; and yet it seemed like looking back on some one like herself and not herself, whose life was not hers. There was so vast a gulf between the present and the past; she was so different then from what she was now. She had lived centuries of suffering in those two years. She was living now in apprehension, dreading most of all in the immediate future the meeting with Vivian Devereux.

He loved her and trusted her; and she was

deceiving him, and must deceive him yet again—not only tacitly, but in actual words. Lie to him! She would not shrink from the knowledge: she would face it. She repeated the thought aloud, that by the sound of her own voice she might perceive more fully its hideousness, and nerve herself for the task. Was it not juggling to recoil from weaving one more thread into the web of untruth, from reiterating with the lips that which the life declared? In reason, in logic, perhaps, it was mental juggling; but there are phases of feeling in the human heart that lie beyond the realm of reason. To lean on Vivian's breast, to meet his eyes, and frame a lie—a lie. too, that should gain strength from its appeal to the very nobility of his nature—oh, could she do this? Must she not falter and fail? Fail! No: it was for his sake!

"For his sake," she repeated, slowly, and her dark eyes were burning, her lips settled "It is for his sake; with a deathless resolve. and for that I can dare all—do all—dielive in torture—all, all! I will shrink from nothing that can answer to that watchword, 'For his sake!'"

And now the time was close that she must meet him. The clock on the mantelpiece rang out ten in silvery chime; and before the last stroke had struck a carriage stopped without. The blood rushed to the girl's prow—she almost staggered; but in a moment she had recovered; and, when the servant knocked at the door, she said "Come in" in her usual tone, and was carelessly glancing over some music as the door opened.

"M. de Saint Léon is in the library, madam, as you desired," said the servant, and

retired.

She stood still a moment after the door had

closed, and wrung her hands again.

"What will the end be?" she said, inwardly. "On this side a precipice—on that a height that cannot be scaled. And I walk on a path enveloped in mist. One false step—"

She paused, shivered, and passed hastily out of the room, through the corridor, down the wide stairs, and then she stopped. Her hand was on the library door. Her heart was not throbbing now—it seemed quite still—for she was hardly breathing. Only for a time in which one might have counted four she stood so, and then she opened the door and entered the library.

She was in Vivian Devereux's presence—alone with him. There was no need now for mask or subterfuge. He had turned at the movement of the door—one step forward, and she was clasped in his arms, in silence, unbroken even by the quick utterance of her name. A lifetime was lived in those moments. He knew not how long it was before he could

speak; he could only hold her to his heart, with such agony of passionate joy and suffering as no tongue could utter, and press his trembling lips to hers again and again. past—ay, even the previous night, if remembered—was a dream, the future a blank; the present was all he recognised; and, ah, how she clung to him—Vivian Devereux's hapless love-whose hand must still wound the heart that beat against her own! How she strove to crush back the agonised sobs, and might have conquered still; but when, at length, in low, quivering tones, Vivian spoke to her, repeating her name with such passionate dwelling on the sound, as if there had been magic in it—as indeed to him there was calling her his darling, his own, once more if to part again on earth, yet never to part in soul—his own, for time and eternity then the last barrier was broken down, and all the pent-up anguish of years swept over her in a tempest that seemed to threaten her very life, that Vivian was powerless at first to soothe; for, alas! his loving touch and voice were like bitter reproaches to She shrank from him; and yet, when he would not suffer this, but only held her closer to him, the great force of his wonderful love overmastered the wild impulse within her; it seemed as though he would not, could not, cast her off.

She clung to him once more, instinctively, with a strange sense of protection, of holding by an anchor that could not fail her, of perfect faith in a love that, if it knew all, would forgive all. She grew calmer; and indeed nature itself must have succumbed to such racking grief, that left her for a time utterly exhausted, so that her very senses staggered; and, dizzy and trembling, she lifted her head from Vivian's breast, and looked up into his face with a vague, wistful, searching gaze that filled him with a keener fear than even the frenzy that had preceded it.

"Is it Vivian?" she said, in a whisper. "Is it Vivian indeed? I am not dreaming, am I? I did meet you last night—tell me, did I not? And when—when I left, you took me to my carriage, and I met your eves with the look in them that is in them now; then you kissed my hand. It was not No, no; nor is this. Tell me a dream? -vou cannot deceive me-shall I wake and hear them say you have died? Tell me,

Vivian."

"Dear one," said the low, sweet voice, "they may tell you that Vivian Devereux is dead. but it is not true. It is no dream that I hold you in my arms, Vera-no dream this kiss on your lips—no dream this voice that speaks to you. Do not try to think; believe me, for you know I cannot deceive you.

heart and brain rest, my darling, and calmness and reason will come to you."

Always docile to him—a very child in obedience—this girl, whose resolute character stood in no need of another's guidance—she suffered him to place her in a low chair; and, when he knelt down by her, still clasping her to him, she leaned her head against him again, like a wearied child, and gradually the cloud passed away, and the clear, powerful mind regained its balance.

She roused herself with a long, shivering sigh.

"Forgive me," she said—and her voice still betrayed physical exhaustion, but the wandering tone was gone—"I shall not give way again—but last night!" She pressed her hand to her forehead. "Vivian, you did not know you would meet me; you could not have williaged and such auffering."

have willingly faced such suffering."

"For your sake and for mine, Vera, I would have avoided it; but it was not possible. I reached London late, and went to the Embassy. The Ambassador was going to the ball, and asked me to accompany him. In answer to my question, he said he believed you would not be there. It was only when we entered the house that I was told you were present. It was too late then to draw back; I feared to give even the faintest clue for suspicion—for I am playing a bold game, Vera. Do you trust me to carry it through?"

"Fully. I seem to have no fear for you, Vivian, though the disguise is to me so thin a veil that I might be pardoned the idea that others must recognise you as I do; but, if they did not discover you in Vienna and Paris, where you and Saint Léon are both known, how should you be betrayed in London?"

"Thank God," said Vivian, brokenly, "that this dread is spared you! Oh, Vera, you asked me just now if it was a dream or a truth that we have met once more! It seems almost a dream to me. Would that I could have better prepared you for it, that I could have found some means to make conjecture certainty; for surely you hoped, if even against hope, that the tidings of Vivian Devereux's death were false, that it was Rafael de Saint Léon who had died?"

"I did hope, Vivian—I more than hoped—it seemed almost conviction; and the more I condemned it as a fancy born of my longing, the more that conviction seemed to wrap round every fibre of my heart; and then it seemed strange that, if the news had been true, Alphonse had not come to me. Then my fears told me that he might have been struck down by fever, for he would never have left you. I compared your letter from Paris with Saint Léon's own letters and with yours; his writing is not like yours; but the

Paris letter was Saint Léon's. I could not

detect any difference."

"Would that I could, that I dared, have spared you!" said Vivian, again. "Ah, Vera, when I wrote that formal letter to you, I seemed in anticipation to be standing by your side, to read your thoughts, to watch your acts! Had I not known you so well, I would not have taken so bold a step as setting afloat a rumour that must reach you in a startling form. Tell me how you heard it first, Vera."

His fingers were straying among her soft curls as he spoke; she looked up quickly, even appealingly, into his face, then her head drooped, and he felt the shiver that ran through

her, as she answered in a low tone,—

"They were calling it in the streets as I came out of the Opera one night; but, though it was a terrible shock, I did not believe it—I could not. Do not grieve for me, Vivian; I can think of such moments calmly; but of you—of all you bear, and bear so nobly—your life blighted under the curse of a crime never committed—"

She paused, struggling with emotions which even Vivian but partially comprehended, for he knew only part of their cause; but he sealed her lips with his own, and soothed her tenderly.

"Verily;" he said, and something of the old bright smile lighted up his eyes—"is it

not Heaven to hold you in these arms, Vera, to look in your face? Ah, my heart, if I could but see it as on that first night when it became to me a 'part of sight'! God prosper me, that I may be able to discover whose hand has wrought the fulfilment of words that have never ceased to haunt me from the moment Oh, Vera, Vera!" he they were uttered. broke out, passionately, "exile, contumely, all the anguish of bearing the burden of another's sin-name, fame, career, blasted-all these I could endure if it were possible for your happiness to be separated from mine—if your life could have sunshine while mine is in gloom. It breaks my heart to see you the same indeed, and yet so changed—so changed!"

He bowed his head on hers, for the first time giving way; and then, for one moment, there was such fierce strife in the girl's soul as, when stilled by the magic watchword—the watchword of her life—"For his sake," left her She must give trembling and nerveless. comfort now; and, though each word and act that soothed his wound planted a fresh stab in her heart, she never faltered nor failed, praying him, with intense earnestness of pleading, not to grieve so for her; she lived in him, for him; and, when he had grown calm again, she looked up into his face, scanning every feature with the old searching, wistful gaze, but now more troubled.

"How, sweetheart? Chandos Royal was already closed. What more have you done?"

"When the first rumour of your death came, Vivian, I had the picture galleries and the room in which Saint Léon's picture hangs locked, and the keys delivered to Aileen Connor; she alone attends to them now, and they are cleaned under her supervision."

"It is better so," said Devereux, stifling a sigh; and then, as the thought of his ancestral home, closed and barred like a prison, while its rightful lord dared set foot in it only as a stranger, rushed back upon him with almost overwhelming force, he rose abruptly to his feet and walked to the other end of the long room, struggling for self-control. His strong will had conquered even before he turned and came back to where she stood, motionless, watching him, with a dumb agony "Forgive me!" he said, placing in her eves. both hands on her shoulders, and bending down to kiss her brow; and, seek to hide it as he would, how could she fail to detect the ring of bitter pain in his voice? "I shall grow more used, with every day that passes, to my new identity and all that it brings with it. It will seem strange to rule my own lands as a trustee; to meet my own servants, who loved me so well, as one who cannot even speak their language; but I shall remember that Vivian Devereux is dead—an example of poetic justice—and that it is M. de Saint Léon who reigns in his stead until-"

The girl held her breath as he paused, and then, as he dropped his hands and turned aside, she said, steadily,—"Until he is proved innocent."

"Or," added Vivian, quietly, "till perchance the subterfuge is discovered, and the lord of Chandos Royal is a prisoner once more."

"Never!" Vera said, in a low, clear voice.
"That shall never be!"

The next moment the blood surged back upon her heart in a dizzy rush, and she instinctively caught at the back of the chair near her, for Vivian's quick, keen look staggered her.

"You speak," he said, "as if you had some suspicion—"

"I have none," she interrupted; "if I had,

why should I keep it from you?"

She uttered no lie, and yet she did not look at him, but straight before her into vacancy, as she spoke; and then, with an almost startling change of manner—he recalled it only too vividly, and what had gone before, a few short months later—she added, hurriedly,—

"Let this pass for the present, Vivian; tell me of Saint Léon, of yourself, your plans, hopes—there is so much I have to learn, and to tell; but you will let me be listener first. Sit here, Vivian; let me kneel by you, as on that night when my father died, and when I saw you last."

Was it the memory of those farewell moments that made her cling so to him, as she knelt by him, sheltered in his close embrace, or was it as the foretaste of a parting in the

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future a thousand times more bitter than even that cruel severance?—for in that there was the hope of reunion, but the parting yet to come must be for ever; beyond it a long, moonless night of misery.





CHAPTER XV.

HALF A TRUTH.

HERE is much indeed," said Vivian
Devereux, "to tell and to hear.
You know that from time to time
I saw my cousin Saint Léon. He

was in Madrid when I went to him. He met me as of old; he believed my word; and perhaps the great world of Madrid might have shared his faith; but my haughty spirit would not face even the possibility of scorn. I wandered from place to place, not even always in Spain; but I was at Cadiz when I heard that Saint Léon had left Madrid ill. He had been sent to Spain, partly on account of his health, which was never robust. I went to him; he was then at Ciudad Rodrigo. Poor Rafael!" He paused, and his lip quivered. "It was then he told me," he went on, "what I had suspected before, that he had no wish for life;

the woman he loved had been faithless to him. and he was neither mentally nor physically fitted to recover from such a blow. rallied after a time—so much so that I was able to leave him, for he was with friends. But before he could return to Madrid he was again attacked, and then, as a last hope, he sought the sea air. He went to a little fishing village on the Andalusian coast, and from there wrote to me. I found him so ill that I knew the end could not be far off, and he did not seek to avert it. He sought death rather than dreaded it. He would have no hireling aid— Alphonse and I were his only nurses. seemed to be no special illness, till, a fortnight before he died, he was seized with a malignant fever, and he had no strength then to battle against it. It was his lips, Vera, that suggested the assumption of his identity. He pointed out how all things seemed to work together for that end. I should not even wrong those who might have been his heirs, for all that he had power to leave he had left to me. Who could divine the truth? The very priest who administered the last sacraments need not know to whom he came to minister. Let Vivian Devereux die : let Rafael de Saint Léon live. I knew those he knew: I knew all the circumstances of his life; we were both strangers in an obscure village. What should hinder me? Yet, Vera, it seemed a cruel wrong to the

noble dead to lay him to rest under a feigned name, neither his nor mine—far from his kin. No stone marks the spot; but I have marked it; and, if ever this cloud is rolled away, if ever I dare stand before the world in my own name, or—nay, sweet one, let me say it—I must look at that alternative"—his voice trembled now, and he drew her yet closer to him—"if the mask be not dropped, but torn from me, and I am made a prisoner once more, I give you the solemn charge to carry out—to remove Rafael de Rohan from his nameless grave and lay him in the chapel at Chandos Royal. He was to me what my father's son never was—a brother."

There was silence for a little time. No need for verbal promise. Was not Vivian's lightest wish, spoken or divined, a sacred trust? Then Vivian roused himself, and went on,—

"Men have for years assumed another identity, facing greater chances of discovery than I had to meet. I had no fear of myself. Duke used to tell me that I was more a foreigner than an Englishman. Nay, I had to watch my tongue in German, for Saint Léon did not speak it perfectly! But his Castilian was very pure. I went to Madrid, and was received everywhere as Saint Léon. From there I returned to Vienna; and again success was with me. I did not bring Alphonse; it was not well that the world should suppose I

had been so much with my cousin as would be implied by taking his servant as my own attendant. Alphonse is now perdu at Cadiz till he hears from me. Paris was my last Saint Léon was not much known there: but you know how well the Parisian world was acquainted with Vivian Devereux-far more intimately than the world of London. The Legitimists received me with open arms; and, while I purposely courted all possibility of discovery, no suspicion of my identity was ever apparent. I met men and women who sought my acquaintance because they had known my cousin so well; and, mon cœur, most of these were still proud to have called Vivian Devereux 'mon ami.' The general belief in Parisian society is in my favour. Even in London, it seems, there are more that acquit than condemn me."

"Ay," said Vera, with kindling eyes, "even though you refused to face a trial, it is said on all sides that the heavy evidence against you was good reason for flight—but that your demeanour when the news of Duke's death was brought to you, and at the inquest, and your own word, clear you. It was only the other day, Vivian, that Lord Sydney Tollemache, your political opponent, said to me, 'I have never believed Chandos-Devereux guilty; if he had been, he would not have denied it."

Vivian's cheek flushed, his lips quivered.

"One day," he said, steadily, "I may be able to thank him and others, who, against so much that might well stagger those who knew me best, still hold me free from blood; and it touches me most of all, Vera, that they believe my word."

He was silent for a moment; then he went

on.

"I thought it would be best, mon cœur but in this I bow to you—that Alphonse should come to London in about a fortnight from hence, and bring to you the news of Vivian Devereux's death. The tale would be this—that Devereux died at an obscure village in Spain, and was buried quietly at night but that no stone marks his grave, and Alphonse could not now point it out. this is true, save that Alphonse, in fact, as well as myself, knows the spot where Saint Léon is laid; but the Court of Chancery, when my heir applies to have Sir Vivian Devereux declared dead, would not be able to entertain such evidence of death, while society in general will credit it. On you it will enforce temporary retirement from the world—yet only till the winter. As for my heir, he is an old malade imaginaire living in the South of France, and I do not suppose will be very urgent with his claim at first, which we should both of course resist. What say you, sweetheart?"

"Let it be as you have planned, Vivian."
Vivian smiled a little. "Docile as of old,
my strong-willed love. Where shall you go—
not abroad, Vera?"

"No," she answered, "I shall go to Temple Rest, and you will visit Chandos Royal and

Rougemont?"

"As trustee, I must do so. Vera, it will be a bitter, bitter trial; yet it must be gone through; but at least I shall be able to see you. Tell me, Vera, something of those I knew two years ago. Doctor Coryn—how is he?"

"Well, Vivian—worshipped by his people, and still keeping his faith in you. I rarely see him, but I hear so much of him, and sometimes he writes to me. He grieves for you as

if he had known you all your life."

"God reward him!" said Devereux, almost in a whisper. "Vera, darling, it will be hard indeed to meet him as a stranger! Nay, forgive me!"—for he felt the trembling that went through her; but she interrupted him passionately.—

"Speak to me as you would speak to your own heart, Vivian. If you are silent, do not I know what you feel? I would share all things

that touch you."

There was such a strange fear in her eyes, she clung so wildly to him, as if some unseen power were seeking to sever him from her, that Vivian held her to him as a mother would clasp a frightened child, who, awakened suddenly from a ghastly dream, clings to her, still peopling the air with the phantoms of the Was there some shadow on Vera's vision. life of which even he, who loved her with such utter devotion, was ignorant? He would not put that troubled thought into words now, for she grew calm again, and the look of fear passed out of her eyes, charmed away by his touch and voice; yet it linked itself with some episodes of the previous night, and the face of Adeline Gresham-Faulkner rose before him as if she had been the personification of that thought. It was not, however, of her that he spoke next, but of faithful Aileen; was she in London?

"No," Vera said; "she is at Temple Rest."

"At Temple Rest! How does she bear the separation from you, mon cœur? Is it necessary?"

"Some one must be there, when I am absent, whom I can thoroughly trust," said the girl, quietly.

Why was it so great an effort not to shrink from him now, to whom, a few seconds before, she had clung almost convulsively? Vivian did not speak for a moment.

"Would it be well," he said at length, thoughtfully, "for Aileen to know the truth?"

"I think it would be well, Vivian. She is

not likely to see you in situations in which any lack of a power to dissimulate in her could betray you. Besides, she is wonderfully quick and clever, and I think would be likely to divine the truth."

"Whom you can trust, Vera, I can trust. And tell me of little Maggie Tredegar. Poor lassie! she was staunch and true; she would not believe 'dear Mr Vivian' guilty, though all the world was against him."

"She lives with her father, Vivian, and is her old self; only I think she is more grave and steady. She is sometimes at Temple Rest, and often at the lodge, for her cousin keeps it She always speaks of you, when I see her, with such unvarying and intense gratitude, and says she hopes to be able one day to serve you."

"Perhaps her wish may be fulfilled," said Vivian, uttering a random thought as he recalled the girl's parting words in the lane on that summer night, which he had then perhaps set down to a mere sentiment of evanescent gratitude. If so, he had evidently misjudged

Maggie Tredegar.

"So," he added, after a pause, "Percy Everest has obeyed my warning, and guarded his tongue. He has done well. And he is in society, and received in your circle. How is this? And you, it seems, do more than tolerate him."

The moment she had so dreaded was come; she was face to face with the lie that must be uttered. He did not see the livid pallor of her face, for she had bent her head down on his breast; but he felt the throbs of her laboured breathing in the moment before she answered him, very low, yet with a voice that

hardly faltered:

"Yes, I know him, but not intimately. Bear with me; I cannot act as I would; he is a friend of Mrs Gresham-Faulkner's. I do not know where he met her, or how; but he is a friend—nothing more; and to her I am bound by ties of gratitude that I cannot shake off. I do not like her; she calls herself my friend; she is not; but can I cast off, can I refuse to lend countenance to, the woman who saved my mother's life?"

"Is this her claim on you, Vera?"

"It is. I met her abroad. She came to me, and not only proclaimed herself, but proved herself, to be one of whom my father had often spoken as having saved my mother's life. They were at the same hotel; it took fire, and this woman nearly lost her life in saving my mother's. Since then she married; my mother died; my father lost sight of Adeline Bernard. The man she married was a gambler; but he died before he had wasted his fortune, and left her well off. She is gently-born; but she could not get into the society

she sought. I was in Paris, and she, being there at the time, heard of me, and came to me, claiming the payment of the debt owed her. It was not noble in her, but could I resist that claim? Like thousands of others, she wants to make a good marriage. If she is an adventuress, so are many who wear coronets and quarter the arms of historical houses—and Everest—"

She paused; she dared not look into Vivian's face. Why was he so silent? It made her cruel task harder—so much harder. Did he doubt her? Ah, surely no; how could he believe she would lie to him? Was he then wounded, pained, that she should be in a manner forced to lend the countenance of her name and prestige to a woman who had evidently impressed him most unfavourably? She could not tell; there was a kind of bewilderment in her mind just now. She pressed her hand to her forehead, and whispered,—

"You do not speak, Vivian—you do not—

think that—that I am wrong?"

He stooped and pressed his lips to her brow. How that kiss pierced her heart like a two-edged sword! How that silent assurance of perfect faith, and love that could not condemn wrung her heart well-nigh to breaking! Yet she nerved herself once more—"for his sake."

"Vivian," she went on, with an effort that could not, that did not, escape him, but there

was ample reason for it, consistent with her' story, "forgive me, but it must be said." Everest is not only Mrs Gresham-Faulkner's friend—but he is your enemy. Stay!" lifted herself as he started, and her light touch on his lips checked the passionate words. would be madness to defy the power he might acquire; it is agony to know it, but we cannot struggle now with open weapons, hand to What is it to me to tolerate even the professed friendship of a man like Everest, in comparison with your safety? Dear Vivian, hear me still! If he should at any time suspect your identity, what should hinder him from betraying you if I had driven him from society? You have recognised that necessity in assuming ignorance of having heard of him from Vivian Devereux."

"I have," said Devereux, in a suppressed voice; "but that you should stoop even to tolerate his presence, Vera, is torture! Friendship! The very word is profaned in such connection. And is it only this? Answer me, Vera."

He spoke sternly now, putting her from him, and looking into her face with eyes that seemed to read her very soul and dare the lie that, all prepared as she was for the question, for the very manner in which it was put, had nearly died on her lips. But she was strung to the highest tension now; even a moment's hesita-

tion would have been fatal; it was the last cast of the die, and to fail now would be to lose all. She did not try to rise; the pressure of Vivian's hand on her shoulder, light though it was, warned her not to attempt even this apparent effort to gain time. She faced him without flinching, and answered without a pause,—

"At present, at least, he dare not advance beyond the line I have drawn. Why should he ever attempt it? Why should he suppose that I feared him so much as to sacrifice pride

and dignity to him?"

"Why should he? Why, in the knowledge that you have any reason for suffering his society, should he not?" Then his face changed; he drew her to him again. "My own darling," he said—and his voice trembled with passionate emotion—"you know that this is to me as if I stood bound hand and foot, compelled to see you on the rack."

"I do know it," she said; "but, oh, Vivian, for your sake I would bow my head to the very dust! Remember the alternative — a thousand times worse to me than any sacrifice short of honour!—try to think calmly of

even—"

"No," interrupted Vivian—and all the man's strong passions burned in his eyes and quivered on his white lips, in every nerve—
"not that! As there is a God above, not

that! I tremble before the demon which the very thought rouses within me. I could better endure eternal exile from you than buy safety at such a cost. Vera, my life"—what wonderful tenderness for her shone like sunshine across the tempest to which his love for her gave such overmastering strength!—"even you must not ask too much of me!"

She shrank and cowered, and hid her face, and her heart fainted within her. She knew it would be-must be so; and did not her own spirit go out to meet that noble jealousy for the honour of a betrothed wife which could not suffer her to endure insult for his sake. which could not stand by silent and see her stoop to listen to vows that were a degradation to her womanhood? Would he not have been less dear to her if he could have, even for a moment, lent himself to the proposition of temporising with Everest to the full length of seeming to receive him, or, at least, not to utterly reject him as a wooer? A colder or more equable temperament might indeed have paused to consider; but in Vivian Devereux's veins burned the hot blood of the South, and Vera's own nature, clasping hands with his, could place herself in his identity, and know that she would feel and speak as he did—if less impetuously, not less irrevocably; for, though stern suffering had aided a resolute will in bringing under control that fiery spirit

which had cost him so dear, it was not subdued, but held only in check, ready to blaze forth when occasion should tempt too strongly.

The girl could not speak. The anguish and terror of the picture that rose before her froze the words on her tongue; nor could Vivian for some moments regain even outward composure. Such men are shaken to the centre by emotions that pass comparatively lightly over most natures. Yet he it was who first broke the silence.

"Let it pass, dear one," he said, softly. "There are some things it were best not to speak of—not to think of."

He laid his hand on her drooping head.

She shivered, and lifted her face.

"Yes; let it pass," she whispered, and her eyes fell, her head sank once more. She could not meet his look.

If, but for one flash of time, too brief for record, the veil had been only partially lifted; if he had seen that face that rested on his breast turned to Percy Everest with the glance that had made him recoil—even in the plenitude of his insolent power—would the hand that was free from blood be spotless still? But to know that the sword was ever over her head—that she writhed daily under the lash of taunts she dared not resent, of looks and tones she dared not spurn—what would this knowledge be to Vivian Devereux, and how

could she keep it from him? She could not think now: her brain was confused and dizzy. Even the awful sense of standing near a precipice, with a black, bottomless gulf below, was vague, though fearfully real; but Vivian's love was hers—nothing would alter that; even if they must be parted when he knew all—when the darkness closed in upon her, and she would be alone, utterly alone, in that "dreary waste" to which her eyes were ever looking—without his voice to whisper comfort, his hand to clasp hers—he would love her still. It was a love all-embracing, allpardoning; and she had never clung to it with more passionate clinging than now, when it seemed as if her fate were narrowing to a point, and the moment of eternal separation were imminent. Bitter as was the anguish of knowing that she had deceived him, though every caress, every tone of his voice, every look was a reproach that it seemed almost impossible to bear-yet she trembled as the inevitable time of parting—only temporary parting—drew near.

"I shall see you again soon—very soon?" she said, pleadingly, with those great dark

eyes so full of pain.

"Surely, my heart. Could I be long absent from you, even though we meet as comparative strangers after two cruel years of longing and waiting? At times it seemed as if I must risk all, and try to see you, if it were only to look on your face; but the thought, I knew, was madness, even when it possessed me most strongly."

"Madness indeed, Vivian! the 'fatal gift of beauty' puts thorough disguise beyond your power. You could not hope to escape

recognition."

"I could wish," said Devereux, "that nature had endowed me less richly. Can I be grateful for a gift that has kept me so long from

you?"

"I would not have it otherwise," said the girl, lifting her own beautiful face to meet his farewell kiss. "I cannot think of you—I cannot wish to think of you—as different from the Vivian Devereux I loved."

"Ah, mon cœur"—he spoke with the old bright smile, only more deeply tinged now with sadness—"can I reproach you for heroworship, for verily you might retort, 'Physician, heal thyself?"

Vera's features, her whole manner, changed

suddenly.

"No, no," she said, hurriedly, "do not speak so, Vivian; the idol may turn to clay."

"When it does," answered Vivian, quietly, "I will believe that the heart I won in happier days was false from the beginning; that the lips I kissed would have betrayed me even then; that the tears wept in these arms in

that prison-cell were but a mockery. Why tempt me? Why try me? Were the words I spoke to you on that summer evening, so often lived through again, only the utterance of a passing passion? 'I have given my whole heart—my whole life of love—into your keeping, and I cannot take it back; even your own hand could not crush it, for you could not make me believe the heart was false!'"

Had those noble words ever ceased to ring in her ears? Then they had brought the ineffable comfort of assurance that lulled to rest a dim and nameless presentiment; now they thrilled her with the terrible knowledge of a force to be met—a force that could not be conquered in a stern conflict that lay before them both in the immediate future—a conflict in which that sublime faith should be to her at once the very sanctuary of her love and her most powerful foe.





CHAPTER XVI.

A BARGAIN.

GO to-morrow, at three, to Mr Santon's studio, to see his new picture. Drop in — by chance, you know—so as to escort me

home. I must speak to you."

So Vera Calderon wrote to Percy Everest; and, when she had despatched the letter, she rose and stood perfectly motionless, one hand pressed tightly to her heart. Her features were locked and rigid, but there was a restless fever in the eyes.

"It must come soon," she said, inwardly. "Will he choose the alternative I shall offer? Yes; it will be for him the best vengeance, and the safest. And Vivian—will he believe me then? Oh, is my heart so weak that it can leap within me at the knowledge that, even in such a cruel trial, he will be true to his words—that my own lips could not persuade

him his idol had turned to clay? Weak! Is it weakness? How can I wish his love less

perfect—his faith more vulnerable?"

She sank down on her knees by the table, covering her face. Then Alba, the bloodhound, who had been watching her with wistful eyes, rose up and came to her, whining softly, rubbing his rough head against her velvet cheek, and licking her hands. How often before had he been the only witness of her grief and despair! She turned, and put her arms about his neck, caressing him fondly, while her tears fell fast and her voice was choked by sobs.

"Faithful Alba!" she whispered, "you will see Vivian, whom you love even better than you love me. You will know him again, Alba," she went on, talking to him as those do who love dogs and know how much more they understand than is often supposed; "and he did not forget you; but you were in the Park this morning when he came. Vivian will come again to-morrow, Alba, and you shall see him. Do you understand me, Alba?"

It almost seemed that the animal did, at least partially, understand her. Each time that she mentioned the name of Vivian he laid back his ears, looked earnestly into her face, and licked her hands frantically; and even of her other words there must have been some comprehension, for at her question he ran to

the door, and pushed his nose against it with an impatient whine, and then looked back at her with that intensely eager questioning expression that gives to a dog's face an actually human intelligence.
"Not yet," said

said Vera, half sadly-"to-

morrow, Alba."

The animal knew every inflection of her voice. His ears drooped; he came back to her, with disappointment plainly depicted on his face, but rubbed his head against her again, as if to assure her that he was not ungrateful to her.

"Who," said the girl, caressing the noble creature so dearly loved, "among all these who revolve around the sun in its glory, would remember the light when the clouds come and the rain descends? Who, if I were sick or in prison, would visit me? Who so faithful a friend as thou, Alba? Not one."

She sighed heavily, and rose to her feet as a hand was laid on the door. It opened, and gave admittance to a stately, middle-aged lady, a Frenchwoman, as a glance would have shown. Vera turned to her with perfect self-possession.

"Chère madame," said she, "are you come to scold me for lingering here with Alba, instead of going to dress for Lady Kynaston's?"

"I did not come to scold you, chérie; but is

it not time?"

"I shall go late, and stay only for an hour,"

Vera answered. "There is more sense and sympathy in Alba than in half the people I shall meet to-night. I will not drag you there, chère madame. Lady Constance will go with me. I will take her up on the way."

She went wearily to be dressed in satin and lace and jewels, and shone for an hour in Lady Kynaston's salon, where she had congratulated Vivian Devereux on his maiden speech, and where every one now was talking of Count Saint Léon; and Westminster's great bell was booming out the first hour of the morning when she reached home, to find a letter from Everest. He should not be able to go to Mr Santon's studio; he would call at Carltonhouse Terrace in the morning. Vera crushed the letter in her hand, and the blood flushed hotly over her colourless face.

"I could find it in me," she said, "to refuse him when he calls, since he dares to name time and place, as though he were master. Great Heaven! when will the hour of reckoning

come?"

Yet, when, about twelve o'clock, Mr Everest was announced, Vera threw aside the book she was reading, or seemed to be reading, and went to the drawing-room. Everest came towards her, holding out his hand, and seeking in a face always unrevealing for some clue to her note.

"I wish I could have complied with your

request," he said; "but I have another engagement this afternoon, so I thought I might call instead."

"It matters little," returned the girl, coldly, while she remained standing, evidently intending him to understand that the interview was to be brief. "What I have to say can be said quickly. It is not to entreat, but to command, forbearance."

"Command! You use strange language, Vera."

"Do I? I never speak at random, as you well know. Hear me. Vivian Devereux is reported dead. Whatever I may think or fear. I do not, as yet, to the world, fully credit that report. Yet it must seem to many that I cannot treat it as an absolutely baseless To-day I saw M. de Saint Léon in this house. I naturally asked him what he thought. He, like me, was in doubt: but he told me frankly that the rumour was not unlikely to prove well founded. He is Vivian Devereux's first cousin, and loved him well. He is my co-trustee. I must of necessity see much of him. I cannot suffer him to receive the impression that before the man who would have been my husband is cold in his grave the grave of an exile—I am listening to other Nay, more, I cannot give society cause to whisper that Percy Everest aspires to be more than a friend to Vera Calderon."

Everest folded his arms, and looked at her for a moment in silence.

"I understand," he then said—"the price of ultimate victory is to be present submission. The chain that binds you must not be visible to the society that adores you and follows your lead. The beau monde must not be prepared for the scandal that will astonish it before another six months are passed."

She gave another meaning to the cruel words, and clenched her right hand convulsively under the fold of her robe; but she only

answered,—

"You can afford to yield something in the present. Take care that you heed my injunction, especially in Count Saint Léon's presence."

"What are Saint Léon and his opinions to

you or to me?" demanded Everest.

The girl turned upon him almost fiercely.

"To you, nothing," she said—"to me, much. When the scandal, as you rightly call it, startles the world in which I move, I shall have given up my trusteeship of the estates of Chandos-Devereux, and M. de Saint Léon and myself will be as strangers to each other. Till then, is it a small thing that I should seem false to every instinct of womanhood, of faith, of honour? What have you to gain, except the tiger's pleasure of inflicting torture, by giving the world a right to pour scorn on my name?"

"Vera," said Everest, half recoiling, yet turning white with anger, "you have warned me not to try you too far; beware how you yourself commit that error and try me too far."

"You will choose revenge," returned Vera Calderon, with undisguised contempt, "when nothing else is left you. Now let this interview close. I never have time to waste, and to-day is no exception to the rule."

Everest turned to the door, then paused, and

looked back with a bitter sneer.

"Use your liberty while you have it," he.

said; "it will not be for long."

"No, not for long," she cried, locking her hands together as the door closed on him —"not for long! But the key that locks me out from freedom will be none of your forging, Percy Everest. Fool, to believe that I would not sooner take with my own hand this wretched life—sooner face an eternity of woe —than an earthly future with you!"





CHAPTER XVII.

FOWLER AND BIRD.

HEN "M. de Saint Léon" presented himself in Carlton-house Terrace, he was informed that Miss Calderon had been unexpectedly called out

for an hour or two; she would return home very shortly, and he was shown to the draw-

ing-room to wait for her.

His own house this had been once, and he had lent it one season to a college friend, and once had given a dinner-party to Lord Lascelles, when he took his degree, in the great dining-room below. He shrugged his shoulders, for circumstances were hardly likely to have subdued the old sarcastic spirit, and walked round the room, looking at the pictures and statues that adorned it. Suddenly he paused before a picture by Ansdell, and his lip quivered; the tears rose to his eyes. It

was the portrait of a splendid Cuban blood-hound.

"Faithful friend in many a peril," he said, inwardly, "how I long to see you, my noble Alba!"

He turned with a start at a slight sound in the direction of the door; and there stood the original of the picture, his tail waving slowly to and fro, his head on one side, his whole mien and look wistful and questioning.

Vivian advanced a step.

"Alba," he said, softly, with beating heart
—"dear old Alba!"

The familiar voice and words were enough. With a bound of frantic joy the noble dog sprang forward; there could be no doubt of his recognition, not of his original master, Saint Léon, who had given him away as a puppy of three months, but of Vivian Devereux. Poor Alba was fairly beside himself; he was mad with joy; he licked the hands, the face, the feet of his master; he crouched down, looking up at him with such loving eyes as surely needed no eloquent tongue to help out their dumb language of devotion; and then he laid his great honest head against his master's breast, and whined and whinnied, trembling with joy under the soft caress of the loved hand, and hardly refraining from fresh transports when the tender voice spoke to him. At length he

settled down into a state of more tranquil, though not less intense, delight, and, fairly exhausted with excitement, sat with his head on Vivian's knee, perfectly happy. There was no shadow on his canine mind; the master he had never ceased to miss was found again, and Alba, happy creature! revelled in the present, and recked not of the future.

"It was well, my Alba," said Vivian, who had been too deeply moved to speak much, "that no one was by to witness your too evident recognition of your old master. I fear you would have betrayed me. Henceforth it will be enough to make you a little older when M. de Saint Léon parted with you; but that stretch of the long bow would hardly have accounted for such joy as you showed just now."

It was well indeed that Alba—who, in truth, had been shut in the breakfast-room by Vera when she went out, but had effected his escape on the entrance of a servant, who was not aware that he was to be kept in "durance vile"—had not entered the drawing-room five minutes later; for, as Vivian spoke, a carriage stopped without, and from it there stepped Mrs Gresham-Faulkner, attired in the "last thing" in driving costumes.

"Out, but expected shortly?" she said, repeating the information vouchsafed by the footman who answered her inquiries for the

mistress of the house. "Well, I will wait for her. Is there anyone in the drawing-room?"

"M. de Saint Léon, madame."

"Ah, I know him! I will wait for Miss Calderon, then."

And, well pleased to meet again the handsome and brilliant ex-attaché, who was already the "fashion," the lady fluttered upstairs. It was true Saint Léon had administered to her a decided though most courtly rebuff at Lady Landport's ball; but Mrs Gresham-Faulkner was not easily abashed. If she did not choose to take a hint, she could be as blunt to rebuffs as a Lowland Scotchman.

As the footman flung open the drawingroom door, the Count rose from the sofa, and

advanced to greet the newcomer.

"Ah, M. le Comte," cried she, "so I find you making friends with Miss Calderon's friend; and, by the way, one of your own, is he not? Dear creature!"—flipping her lemon-kid over Alba's head. She detested dogs, but would have called a toad a "dear creature" if she had any motive for the expression of affectionate interest.

"An old friend of my own," the Count returned, smiling a little. "And he knew me, too, though he was only about six or eight

months old when I parted with him."

"Dear me! But dogs have such tenacious memories. Do you not think it likely, though,"

she added, seating herself on the sofa, and moving her skirt a little to intimate that there was room for the Count beside her, "that the animal may have mistaken you for your cousin?"

"At first," said Devereux, coolly, taking the vacant place and stroking Alba's head, which was instantly laid on his knee again, "he might have been puzzled; I think he was. But a dog would not long remain under such an error; he knew the difference of voice directly."

"Yet there is a ring in your voice like Sir Vivian's," said the widow, fanning herself; adding hastily, "How hot this room is! But

of course you do not feel it?"

She certainly had flushed; Vivian answered quietly,—

"The room seems to me pleasantly cool,

madame. You knew my cousin then?"

"Oh, no—not to speak to! I never met him; but I heard him speak once. It was outside a theatre in Paris—I forget which theatre; and it was a voice to remember, you know. You must have noticed it yourself."

"I used to tell him so," said Vivian, with a half sigh. How often, in his weary illness, had Rafael Saint Léon whispered, "Your voice always soothes me, Vivian; it is so full of music." The half sigh fulfilled its purpose; it seemed to encourage the widow to do just what he wanted her to do—to talk about Vivian Devereux; and she fell into the trap.

"It was a terrible fate," she said, sympathetically. "May I ask, do you think it is true—this rumour?"

"Madame, I have tried to ascertain the truth. At present, I know no more than the newspapers have already published. I fear that it may be true; I hope that it is not."

"Hope? Well, in one way, one must hope; and you, I suppose—pardon me—share Miss Calderon's opinion—that he is not guilty of

the crime laid to his charge?"

"I have never believed him guilty, madame."

"Perhaps," said the widow, "you knew little of the cause which might have led up to such a crime. The reports of the inquest disclosed the enmity existing between him and his brother; but that enmity dated from Vivian's childhood—and, though I, for one, do not believe that Sir Marmaduke Devereux was a saint, it was notorious that Vivian was not—in fact, his father well-nigh banished him the house."

"I have not seen much of my cousin," remarked the Count, still caressing Alba; "but it always seemed to me that he was more sinned against than sinning."

"He charmed many into thinking so," said the widow; "and society says on all sides now that Vivian Devereux was not the profligate he was thought to be. It is perhaps—moralists say so—an admirable trait in human nature that misfortune inclines us to condone a man's failings."

This speech, and the manner in which it was uttered, implied that the speaker's own opinion of Vivian Devereux remained un-

changed.

"An amiable weakness," observed Saint Léon, glancing covertly at the widow's face; but, after all, neither fortune nor death can alter truth. A stern sense of justice forbids such condonation. We may be mistaken in our judgment of a man; we may abstain from openly condemning him; but adverse fate cannot whitewash wrong-doing, if wrong-doing there has been."

Again the widow fell into the trap.

"I am glad to hear you say so, M. de Saint Léon, though you are Sir Vivian's cousin, and do not believe him guilty of the death of his brother. I have blamed myself because, though, for my dear friend's sake — Miss Calderon, I mean—I would fain believe as she does, I cannot persuade myself to cast aside the weight of direct and collateral evidence against Sir Vivian in favour of his bare word (when his motive for denial was so strong), and his demeanour and subsequent conduct when told of the crime. You will forgive me,

I know "—lightly laying her delicately-gloved

hand upon his arm.

"Madame—pardon—I can have nothing to forgive; a public man—be he statesman or criminal, real or supposed—is public property. I am not unbiased in this matter—you are;

and you share the opinion of thousands."

"Totally unbiased," she replied, "or rather -as I said just now—I should naturally incline, for Vera's sake, to think the best of Vivian Devereux; I can have no possible reason to dislike him, for I never saw him, except on the one occasion I mentioned to you: and I never saw his brother at all."

"Of course," said Devereux, upon whose keen and subtle mind the widow's last words had produced an opposite impression to that intended—for why so earnestly affirm a fact which was not directly or by implication questioned?-"if you never knew the Chandos-Devereux personally or collaterally, you can have no reason to dislike them. saw the elder brother? I am sorry; my cousin hardly spoke of him when I saw him. I should like to have heard what you thought of him"—there was a slight stress on the first pronoun which helped the glance of the dark eyes to point the delicate flattery.

The woman's cheek flushed under the soupcon of rouge. A woman of stronger mind than Adeline Gresham-Faulkner might have felt

flattered by receiving such a tribute to her discernment from a man like Rafael de Saint Léon, especially after so short an acquaintance.

"You do my penetration more credit, monsieur," she said, looking down and playing with her fan, "than the conceit you men always charge upon us poor women claims for it. If I had known Sir Marmaduke Devereux, what would my opinion be worth?"

"Ah, madame," said the Count, softly, "you are so modest that I shall seem too bold in asking you to believe that, though this is only the second time I have had the honour of meeting you, I have made no mistake in my estimate of your powers of discernment!"

"Oh, flatterer, flatterer!" cried the lady.
"They say that Vivian Devereux had a golden tongue; and surely it was from his French blood he inherited the gift."

"If the golden tongue only speak truth—" said Saint Léon, but she interrupted him.

"If? But how often it clothes deceit! And if it lend its aid to beauty and genius, to win the jewel another strives for?"

She stopped with a half laugh. Was she conscious that there was a certain hardness in her tones? Saint Léon was, and filled up the pause.

"Do you speak," he said, looking at her earnestly, "with any knowledge of Vivian

Devereux unknown to me? For, as I tell you, I have seen little of him. Forgive me, but your words seemed to enclose more than a merely philosophical commentary on mine, and Vivian was dear to me; yet, if I could believe him guilty of deliberate villainy— Madame,

you have said too much or too little."

"Nay, nay," said Mrs Gresham-Faulkner, trembling with mingled emotions. Was this gifted man fascinated by her? He was indeed worth the winning. "Though Vivian Devereux's gallantries—as the cant of fashion calls deception and profligacy—earned him an evil repute, yet I myself know no fact to bring against him. What was in my mind just now touched one ground of disagreement between himself and his brother."

"You allude to Sir Marmaduke's attentions to Miss Calderon? But how was Devereux of

Rougement to blame for that?"

"He was not to blame, perhaps. It was, I suppose, a fair field and no favour; and Miss Calderon must needs listen to Vivian Devereux rather than his brother. You who knew him—But I cannot speak in praise of him to you who are so like him."

"Yet," said the Count, slowly, "was Miss Calderon one to turn from solid worth to even wealth of intellect and personal beauty if deformed by moral degradation?"

"Have not women ever done so? Did not

Leila—an apt analogy in this case, for you remember that coincidence of the ball—did not Leila turn from Hassan to the Giaour?"

"No," said Saint Léon, quietly. "Leila had loved the Giaour, when Hassan had made her his slave. Do you intend"—how he watched her, yet so covertly that one could not perceive it while he spoke—"to push the analogy so far as to assert that Marmaduke Devereux had a prior claim on the affections of Miss Calderon?"

There was a flash in the woman's eyes—a sharp, hard compression of the lips; then, as

quick as lightning, came a total change.

"Oh, no!" she said, in that extremely mild and level tone that betrays to a keen intelligence the very joint in the armour it is designed to conceal. "I confess myself wrong—it is a dangerous experiment to force a parallel. Sir Marmaduke was good-looking—all the Devereux were—but he could not in anything, mental or physical, compare with his brother."

"You have left out, madame, the point I

touched—his morality."

She laughed, a short, bitter laugh.

"I said before that I did not believe Sir Marmaduke a saint," she answered; "of course I speak only from hearsay in both cases. No; Vivian at least made no pretence. If he was a Don Juan, he never donned a friar's cowl to cover his peccadilloes. Ah! M. de Saint Léon, it is my belief—I may be wrong, and Vera, whatever her opinion, is ever silent on these matters—that Vivian Devereux, roué though he was, was a better man than his brother! You will say," she added, a little hurriedly, and after a hardly perceptible pause, "that I am speaking as a woman, for I admit that I have no personal knowledge. Be it so; take the opinion for as much as it is worth, and "—her fingers rested for a moment again on his arm—"forgive me if I have pained you. You have elicited more from me than I would have said; blame for this your own power, not my weakness."

"If an anxious wish be power, and the ready sympathy that meets it weakness, madame," said the sweet-voiced diplomatist, who certainly shared his unfortunate cousin's charm of manner, "then must we divide the burden."

"You disclaim the rest? Eh, bien!" returned Mrs Gresham-Faulkner, "custom forbids women to speak the truth—some truths

at least—so my lips are sealed."

"In silence more eloquent than words—for me," said the Count, speaking the first words

lightly, the last earnestly.

M. le Comte de Saint Léon was not behindhand in the finest shades that belong to the arts of the gallant; but then he was so like Vivian Devereux! As the words left his lips the door opened, and Vera Calderon came in. Vivian seated beside Adeline Gresham-Faulkner, and Adeline fluttered and beaming! The girl's heart sank within her. Adeline was a mere plaything in Vivian's hands; had he any suspicion of her? If he had been toying with her vanity and her ignoble ambition, it was for some end; that end Vera must defeat. All this flashed through the girl's mind in the second that elapsed between the opening of the door and her advance to meet the guests, who rose to greet her.

"My dear Miss Calderon," cried the widow, gushingly, "I thought you were never coming—though M. de Saint Léon almost beguiled

me into forgetting the flight of time!"

"I ought, then, to thank M. de Saint Léon." said Vera; "but of him I must ask pardon. Indeed, monsieur, I am so grieved that I have been obliged to keep you waiting."

"To wait for a lady," said the Count, touching with his lips the hand she held out, "is as

spring to summer."

She smiled carelessly; such language was her daily bread; and Mrs Gresham-Faulkner glanced at her to see if she exhibited any sign of pleasure. Her scrutiny was baffled; but with a jealous pang the handsome widow wondered how Rafael de Saint Léon could resist the fascination of Vera's beauty and mental attractions. Vain though she was, she

had never dreamed that in Vera's presence her lamp could burn brightly; yet, as she drove homewards, her busy brain was full of schemes, and the striking face of the French diplomatist was in the foreground.

And he said nothing to Vera of his interview with the widow, nothing of any thought he might have of her, and Vera did not question him. Did she shrink from obtaining from his own lips the knowledge that should enable her to baffle him—even though in the end "for his sake"?





CHAPTER XVIII.

A GHOST.

than justice to her faithful friend Aileen Connor, when she had said she was keen-witted. Aileen had

inherited her full share of that bright and ready intelligence which is so characteristic of the natives of the Emerald Isle. This natural gift was quickened by an education superior to that often possessed by women of her rank—for Aileen was above the mere peasantry, her father having been a farmer, who had, at one time, farmed many acres—and she had, in addition, not failed to profit by her constant contact with the cultured intellect of her young mistress.

It was, therefore, nothing strange that, when two days after Saint Léon's arrival in London Aileen received a letter from Vera, she opened it in the hope that it might, in language of

which she alone could divine the deeper meaning, throw some light on the thoughts that had perplexed her mind concerning Vivian Devereux; for, like Vera, she had grave doubts as to the truth of the statements that he had died in Spain. In daily scanning the newspapers in the hope of seeing something about Sir Vivian, Aileen had, on the day following Lady Landport's ball, seen a paragraph stating that the Comte de Saint Léon, cousin of Sir Vivian Chandos-Devereux, and joint trustee with Miss Vera Calderon of his estates, had arrived in England, and was present at the Marchioness of Landport's ball in Piccadilly, where he was presented to Miss Calderon; and Aileen's heart beat high with hope. What did this letter say? So littlethat Aileen clasped her hands with the mental ejaculation,—

"Blessed Mary! sure an' I can't be desavin' meself because it's what I wish! Sure it's the masther! What would I give to look on his beautiful face again an' hear his voice! I don't think he could hide it from me!"

Yes; if this man had indeed been Rafael de Rohan, why had not Vera said more? To Aileen she spoke her thoughts. She would have pointed out the differences between him and his cousin, and said whether they were more or less discernible than in the picture; most of all, she would have noted any similarity

—or marked dissimilarity—of voice. But she only said that Saint Léon had arrived, that she had met him at the ball, and had seen him the next day in Carlton-house Terrace; adding that he would shortly go down to Chandos Royal, and that she herself would be at Temple Rest before long. What should bring Vera to Temple Rest in the height of the season?

"I am sure it's none else," said Aileen again; "an' I hope—ah, my darling, for your sake I hope—" But here Aileen's reflections were interrupted by the entrance of a servant to say that Maggie Tredegar had brought the laced handkerchiefs; for Maggie had a notable skill in the working of initials.

"Are you there? Come in, Maggie!" cried Aileen; and in walked the girl, as pretty as ever, but certainly less coquettish, and looking

just now a little crestfallen.

"Sit down, Maggie. Why, mavourneen," added Aileen, with the national quickness to perceive any change of feature or manner, "what's wid ye? You are not botherin' your head, are you, because you said you'd bring the things last night, and you didn't? There's no hurry. Miss Vera don't lack for a dozen or more of handkerchiefs, shure!"

"It isn't that," began the girl, hesitatingly.
"I did bring them last night—but—I didn't

come on."

"What do you mane?" asked Aileen. For answer Maggie asked a question.
"You believe in ghosts, don't you?"

"Shure!" said the Irishwoman, crossing herself, but a keen watchful look came into her eyes. "What do you mane, Maggie? Out wid it! It isn't Aileen Connor would

laugh at ye."

"Well," said Maggie, in a low eager tone, "it was quite dark by the time I had the work finished, and I came the short cut round through the pine-wood and by the shrubbery. I don't know how it was I didn't feel much afraid, because, ever since Mr Duke's murder. I wouldn't be anywhere about there after dark for anything. I was through the wood, and near the shrubbery, when I began to get frightened; and all of a sudden"—the girl grew white and shuddered violently—"a man came into the path; at least it looked like a man."

"One of the servants, maybe," suggested Alieen, stooping over the handkerchief and examining the initials in the corner. "Did

ye see his face?"

"No. It couldn't be a servant; he had on a long cloak and a hat like—like the picture of that gloomy old Spanish Don in the hall. Aileen" — lowering her voice to an awed whisper—"does he walk?"

"Troth," replied the ready-witted Irish-

woman, "listen to me, Maggie: I couldn't say that it wasn't a trick, but it's just this—they do say Don Diego walks sometimes, and that, if he's seen, it manes sorrow to the Calderons. Heaven knows there's enough fallen on Miss Vera to spare them all from this day! But don't be chattering about. Laste said, best, of such things; Miss Vera wouldn't like it."

"Nobody knows it but me," said Maggie.
"I didn't tell my cousin, because she's not well, and it would have frightened her so much; so now I'll say nothing at all—not even to father. I don't know how I got back to the lodge, for I was half dead with fright."

"And do you mane to say you only saw what you've towld me of?" asked Aileen, with

interest.

"Nothing more; he was gone in a second—too quick for mortal man," said the superstitious Cornish girl, shuddering—"and I wouldn't have waited to see more."

"Poor girl!" said Aileen, sympathisingly, "don't talk of it! Stop and have some dinner with me. And what do you think, Maggie? Maybe Miss Vera will be coming down soon; an' Sir Vivian's cousin is over here, an' he'll be coming down."

"Miss Vera!" cried Maggie, clasping her hands, and forgetting even the ghost in her

joy. And then her face fell again.

"But, ah! Aileen," she said, her brown eyes full of tears, "I don't want to see the Count; he's so like the one we'll never see again, that'll never have right done him now. I'd rather he was different than have him so like and yet not the same."

Aileen could offer little comfort here; but she made the girl stop with her, and did her best to efface the impression produced on her mind by her night encounter with the ghost of old Don Diego.





CHAPTER XIX.

"GRIEF'S EARNEST MAKES LIFE'S PLAY."

OCIETY was determined to make a darling of Count Rafael Saint Léon; but the Count somewhat disappointed society in that he numberless invitations, and rather held aloof from the flattering attentions bestowed on him. Nor was it easy to be vexed at a reserve which, under the painful circumstances of his position and the uncertainty hanging over the fate of Vivian Devereux, did him credit. He pleaded business—and indeed the plea was to a great extent a true one; but still he mingled, though sparingly, with the world of fashion, and delighted the soul of Mrs Gresham-Faulkner by appearing one evening at one of her assemblies. Constance Morton was "charmed" with him; so was pretty Florrie; but the latter struggled with a kind of antagonism against him because

of that very likeness to Vivian in person and manner which, in his presence, banished all memory of a feeling that the girl told herself was unjust and even foolish. She wondered if Vera felt as she did; but it was of no use watching her in the hope of reading her feelings. Florrie had long since given up that as fruitless.

She ran into Vera's house one Sunday afternoon, nearly a fortnight after Saint Léon's arrival in England, and found Vera in the drawing-room, and the Count with her. girl was at the piano, playing Schumann's Fantasiestücke, and Saint Léon stood by, listening. Florrie, who, without entering into music of this class with Vera's knowledge and depth of perception, was yet passionately fond of it, made a hasty deprecating sign to the player not to interrupt the piece; but Saint Léon came forward at once, and lifted the girl's pretty hand to his lips.

"It is so long since I have had the pleasure

of seeing you," he said, smiling.
"So long!" repeated Florrie, opening her "Only four days—at the Opera!"

"Ah, but four days may sometimes seem a

century!"

"Not in this case," said Florrie, thinking that, if he had been speaking to her and thinking of Vera, he might be using no exaggerated language; and, as she seated herself a little distance off, she found herself watching the Count, if perchance his glance should rest on Vera with more interest than belonged to so short an acquaintance. But a keener scrutiny than Florrie Morton's would have detected nothing to indicate that the French noble was likely to find the society of his cotrustee too attractive for his own peace of mind.

He thanked her earnestly, with a musician's appreciation, when the piece was finished, and then Vera turned to greet her friend.

"I hope you mean to remain, Florrie," she

said; "you have no other engagement?"

"You would tempt me to break it, if I had," said Florrie; "so I will stay. Does M. de Saint Léon play?" she added, half to Vera, half to the Count—for Florrie Morton felt considerable mauvaise honte in uttering her not very fluent sentences to the Count, though she had no difficulty in understanding him when he spoke.

"Yes, he plays; and, Florrie"—Vera smiled a little—"M. de Saint Léon understands quite enough of English for you to speak to him, and that will take a load from your mind."

Florrie laughed and coloured. The Count courteously expressed his surprise that "mademoiselle" should hesitate to employ a language which she spoke so charmingly; but, if she would speak English to him, it would assist him to learn.

"Don't pay me compliments which are undeserved, but prove Vera's statement that you can play," said Florrie, with the bluntness her disguised cousin so well remembered; and she wondered whether he played half as well as Vivian did. The thought made her sigh, and brought the tears to her eyes.

Vivian, as he took Vera's vacated place at the piano, knew exactly what was passing in pretty Florrie's mind. And he smiled secretly. How could he help it? It would be strange if he played less skilfully than Vivian Devereux!

He chose a nocturne of Chopin's, and played it with such delicate and pathetic expression that Florrie listened with her heart in her eyes, and Vera's thoughts went back to the dim gloaming at Temple Rest two years before, when she had first heard Vivian Devereux play.

"Go on," she said now, as then, when he stopped; and he played one of Henselt's dreamy studies; and, as the last lingering cadence ceased, and before Florrie—who had indeed to force back her tears to speak—could utter her thanks, the door opened, and a servant came in and paused with an unusual air of hesitation. Vera rose.

"What is it, Andrew?"

"Please, Miss Calderon"—glancing at the Count and then at Florrie—"some one wants you. Will you step outside a minute?"

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She guessed who it was; but she did not even glance at Vivian as he rose from the piano.

"Will you excuse me for a few moments?" she said, quietly, and passed out into the ante-

room.

"Miss Calderon," said Andrew, in a low voice, "a man is waiting for you in the breakfast - room, who gave his name as Alphonse Duval. He says he was Sir Vivian Devereux's valet."

"Alphonse Duval!" Vera repeated in a kind of mechanical manner. "Thank you, Andrew; I will go to him."

And, calm and stately, she went down the

wide stairs.

As the door closed upon her retreating form, Florrie Morton started to her feet, and looked eagerly and questioningly into Saint Léon's face.

"What can it mean?" she said, under her breath. "Oh, M. de Saint Léon, I am sure it's some one from Vivian!"

"You can but wait the result, mademoiselle; do not, I entreat you," returned the Count,

"agitate yourself."

"How can I help it?" said the girl, forgetting in the sympathetic charm of this man's presence and manner, perhaps through his very likeness to Vivian, that he was almost a stranger to her. "It is Alphonse, I am sure;

and if he brings- Oh, Count Saint Léon, do you think it can be true? Vivian cannot be dead!"

"He might be; but he certainly is not yet," was the Count's thought; but he said earnestly and gravely, "Mademoiselle, it would be cruelty to ask you to hope. I myself fear the worst, even while I try to hope the best. Chère mademoiselle, I did not know that you loved your cousin so dearly."

Florrie's pretty eyes were blinded with tears.

"I loved him as if he had been my brother," "Who could help loving himexcept those, it seemed, who should have given him the most affection? We used to play together as children; and through all his wanderings he never forgot me. And, oh, what will Vera suffer? I cannot believe him dead!"

She covered her face, sobbing.

"Mademoiselle, I would it were in my

power to give you comfort!"

It was real and deep emotion that shook his voice as he bent over her. He longed to take her in his arms and kiss away her tears, as he would have done, with a brother's tenderness, in the old times; but he could only show her such sympathy as might become Vivian Devereux's cousin, and no more.

"You are too kind," said Florrie, struggling for composure. "I am foolish, I am afraid."

She rose as she spoke and crossed the room. She was vexed with herself. Would the Count think her too ready to give confidence? Surely no; he was too like Vivian to fail in keen and true insight. She turned sharply as the door opened again and Vera entered.

One look at her made Florrie spring forward, and then pause breathless, unable to ask the question that trembled on her lips. Always pale, there was little to note in this respect about Vera now; but her lips were set as with desperate resolve, and her eyes gazed straight before her, as if she saw nothing. The stage would have gained a splendid actress if Vera Calderon's lot had destined her for the footlights.

"Mademoiselle—" said the Count, and paused. The girl half turned to him, and her hand sought instinctively, apparently, for support; she caught the back of the chair on which Florence Morton had been sitting, and grasped it.

"One moment," she said in a low voice—how had she so altered its tone?—" spare me one moment, Florrie"—for the girl was by her side now, and with clasped hands stood awaiting the verdict—" and I will tell you." She lifted her other hand and pressed it to her brow, as if her brain were bewildered and she hardly realised the full force of the blow that had fallen upon her, even prepared as she was

to receive it. "It is true," she said then in that same strange voice, and not as though she spoke to any one present, but rather to herself, "that Vivian Devereux is dead. Florrie—"

A sharp agony came into her eyes, and her colourless cheeks flushed scarlet as Florrie threw up her hands and, with a piercing cry, sank on her knees at Vera's feet, hiding her face in the silken robe. The Count bent down and, raising the weeping girl with gentle force, placed her in the chair by which Vera stood, and Vera knelt by her, soothing her fondly.

"Florrie, try to be calm; try to listen while

I tell you how it was."

"It cannot be true," sobbed Florrie; "God could not suffer it! Oh, Vera, Vera, how can you bear it?"

"I?" said the girl, rising. "Have I not known this for weeks—dreaded to hear my worst fears confirmed? Bear it! How should I weep? I have no tears—would that I had!"

Who could have believed that stony despair—under which there seemed yet to burn a very volcano of passion—acting? Vivian gazed on her in wondering admiration; but he, too, must act; his sympathy, however, with Florrie's grief was genuine and deep, and, with chivalrous tenderness, he bent himself to the task of assuaging the violence of her dis-

tress, and so far succeeded that the poor girl's sobs presently ceased, save for a quick gasp now and then, and she lifted her head with a grateful look into the noble face of Saint Léon, but nearly broke down again, for it seemed almost Vivian's very self. He understood her, and passed behind the chair. Florrie stretched out a timid hand to Vera, who turned to her once more.

"No," said Florrie; "you cannot speak of it now."

"I can, Florrie. I would rather tell you and M. de Saint Léon now, and then speak of it no more. Alphonse was with him; it was, as they said, malignant fever. They were at a little village in Spain. They laid him in unconsecrated ground; but Alphonse does not know the spot, for he himself was seized with the fever, and that is why he could not come to me before. He went to the place of burial when he could move, but there was nothing by which he could mark the spot. That is all. The wrong done can never be atoned for now." She stopped a moment—having spoken in a hurried, mechanical manner—and pressed her hand to her brow again in that weary bewildered way so terrible to see. Presently she said, "Will you tell Lady Constance, or-"

She glanced at the Count, who stood silent, with folded arms; he seemed to control his own grief in his profound respect for her.

"Let me," he said, softly, "be of some use. Let me spare mademoiselle, and write to her mother."

"No," said Florrie, rising; "I will go home at once. I know that you would rather be alone, Vera. I cannot comfort you," she added, clasping the small hand and kissing it

passionately.

"Florrie," Vera answered, "you know how I love you; but now there is no comfort. I were indeed best alone. No"— meeting Florrie's anxious look—"do not fear for me; I shall not faint. Would that I could lose consciousness! Would"—she spoke in a whisper now, and, alas! spoke bitter truth—"that this heart could break indeed, and be still for ever!"

Ten minutes later pretty Florrie, her features closely veiled, was led by Saint Léon to the carriage ordered for her; and, as it drove away, he saw her throw herself into the corner and

bury her face in the cushions.

"God forgive me!" he said to himself, "for bringing such grief to you, my sweet cousin! What would I not have given to breathe the magic words that would have dried those tears? And yet they were jewels to me, too. It is sweet to be loved and mourned."

He turned back, not immediately to the drawing-room, but to the breakfast-room, where Alphonse still waited, and carefully closed the door; and the faithful servant rose up to meet him, "and fell upon his neck and kissed him."

Then, when his first transport had calmed down a little, he asked how "mademoiselle"

had acted out the play.

"Rachel could not have simulated more perfectly," said Devereux, with an involuntary smile; but the smile passed quickly, and he added gloomily, "Heaven knows, there was as much truth as acting! Alphonse"—he laid his hand on the man's shoulder—" come to my chambers to-morrow"—he placed a card in his hand—" and we will arrange for the future. I shall leave London for Chandos Royal in a few days, and Miss Calderon will be at Temple Rest. She will see you again directly. Now I must go to bid her adieu."

He returned to the drawing-room, and Vera

rose to meet him.

"Mon cœur," he said, folding her in his arms and speaking with a half-sorrowful tenderness, "you have learned to act in a school of cruel truth."

"Have I not to act every day?" she answered, wearily—how much even he did not know. "Are we not both acting out a stern tragedy?"

He made no answer; perhaps he could not speak just then. He kissed her brow and lips in silence, and, with one softly-spoken adieu,

left her alone.

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The news spread like a prairie fire; and before noon the next day there was but one theme on every tongue; and the proprietors of the evening newspapers, and assuredly the boys who sold them in the streets, reaped no small advantage by the event that brought down in shame and sorrow to the dust the pride and glory of a noble house.

The sunshine "poured its glorious tide" over the white streets and squares of the West End, and on the throngs in the Ring and the Row; but one who had flashed so brightly through these scenes would know them no more. And where, too, was the face so many often came to see—the face that the brush of Velasquez should have painted? Where was the olive-skinned diplomatist whose skilled and graceful riding had for the last ten days been the admiration of the jeunesse dorée? Both were missing now.

The shutters were up in Carlton-house Terrace; the sun had set in the height of the season. Vera Calderon had gone to distant Cornwall; the handsome chambers in Pall Mall were virtually closed; M. de Saint Léon would leave for Chandos Royal in two days. Lady Constance Morton and her daughter went to the family seat in Leicestershire, and several mansions in the West End were temporarily deserted, for the Chandos-Devereux

were linked by ties of blood with many a noble house. An inevitable gloom settled upon society; the Alycone round which all the planets of the firmament revolved was gone; the world, in these modern days, lives so much in the present that people hardly cared to remember that two seasons before they had lived without Vera Calderon. A classical night at the Opera was shorn of a great attraction now when the well-known box was empty; musical connoisseurs could not find elsewhere the unique and delightful réunions of Carltonhouse Terrace, where the leading musical professors and amateurs met together on common ground; the fair placid faces in the Row were scarcely worthy of a glance after that face in which one read a story; even aspiring belles, who might have felt the atmosphere cleared by the fading of the too dazzling light, missed the model whose fashions in dress they had imitated.

And while everywhere, from Pall Mall to Islington, the whole ground of the murder of Sir Marmaduke Devereux and what followed was travelled over again, new questions were asked. Would not the next heir apply to the Court of Chancery to be declared lawful possessor of the estates of the House of Devereux, and would the trustees oppose such application?

"It matters very little," said an eminent

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lawyer one evening at a dinner-table, and the remark was given publicity in the "society" journals, "whether the trustees oppose or not. The Court would never hand over the estates to Roland Devereux on the evidence adduced. It may be conclusive to us as private individuals; but, if the heir is well advised, he will remain at Mentone, at anyrate for the present."





CHAPTER XX.

HOME—HAD HE A HOME?

WO years ago Vivian Chandos-Devereux, newly-elected member for Melton Parva, had ridden through Pengarth amid enthusiastic plaudits,

and everyone who looked on him had prophesied a splendid future for the young lord of Rougemont. Even the "wise women" forgot that he had been born at the fateful conjunction of the elements, or only remembered it to declare that he would defeat his evil destiny. On this night Vivian Devereux, lord not only of Rougemont, but of all the broad lands of the noble House of Devereux, rode through the same village as a stranger, an alien, to whom the language of his own tenants was scarcely known, who must meet his faithful servants as though he looked on each well-remembered face for the first time.

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He had come down by a train that reached Pengarth between ten and eleven, when he knew the village would be asleep. He shrank from the glare of daylight, from the crowd of eager, questioning faces, from the looks of pain and disappointment, because his very likeness to Vivian Devereux was a sharp reminder that he was dead, and had died in exile and disgrace; publicity could only bring him bitter pain; it was better, far better, to ride unseen through the familiar scenes, to pass in the dead of the night through the long-closed gates; the gloom and the silence were best suited for such a coming home as this; the darkness shrouded his life and his heart. He was well pleased that no moon shone, that a sullen, brooding calm lay over sea and land, and no breath of air stirred the leaves of the woods or rippled the long grass that grew by the cliff.

They knew at the station that Count Saint Léon was coming down only when a groom rode up with two led horses; and the porter

came out at the unwonted sight.

"By Jingo!" said he to the groom, whom he knew, "is that there furrin' count comin'

down to-night?"

"Ay," answered the groom,—"wish he wasn't; he's too like master for me to want to see him. Did you see Miss Calderon when she came?"

"Just caught a glimpse of her. She was all

in black and crape; but she always speaks so sweet-like. Bless her! Well, I always said I didn't half believe as Sir Vivian was guilty."

"Served Mr Duke right if he had been," returned the groom; "but I'd never believe it neither. There, 'taint no use talking. It won't bring him back," said the groom, chokingly, "if the right man was found ever so."

"No, that it won't," assented the porter, as he went off to ring the bell to announce the coming train, though there was nobody to go

by it.

The station-master came out upon the dimly lighted platform, anxious to see the foreign trustee of Chandos Royal, and in another moment the headlights of the advancing engine flashed through the darkness, and, with a shrill whistle, the train came groaning into the station.

Only one door was opened, the door of a first-class compartment, and many heads were thrust out of other carriages as two passengers alighted—the first evidently a foreign courier, for Alphonse was as much courier as valet, and, having been au service, bore himself in military style—the last a tall, aristocratic personage, also a foreigner, to whom the porter ran up touching his cap, but started back involuntarily as he saw the face so like that of the lost lord of Chandos-Devereux; but the stranger looked at the rugged, honest features

he recalled so perfectly without recognition, thanked him with gentle courtesy in French, and laid a half-sovereign in his palm—though his services were not needed—for "auld lang syne," only the porter did not know that; and then the two foreigners passed through the little booking-office to where the horses stood. As he touched his hat, the groom—forgetting himself—stared hard at Saint Léon, and then turned quickly to greet Alphonse warmly, for Alphonse had made himself a favourite during his brief sojourn at the Royal. Saint Léon saluted the man with grave courtesy, and mounted in silence; and so they rode away, Alphonse indicating the road, as though the rider in advance did not know every rood of ground over which they passed.

The two servants rode behind their master, and Fred, the groom, eagerly questioned Alphonse, who spoke English fluently, though

with a foreign accent, about Saint Léon.

"He's awful like master," he said, brushing his hand over his eyes; "it reg'lar upset me, it did. One 'ud almost expect him to have said, 'Well, Fred, have you grown wise as you grow older?' as master did last time he see me afore all this bad business—he'd always a good word for every one. There, I can't abide to think of it; and now I s'pose the heir, forsooth! will be comin' and takin' the place. I won't serve him—that I won't!"

"He cannot!" responded Alphonse, with "Monsieur de Saint Léon tell me animation. that ze lawyers will not allow it—zat my evidence not enough; and, though I know it is so true—hélas!"—and here Alphonse's voice shook, and he shed tears with admirable success—"I am glad—vraiment, I am very glad. I would rather this Count and mademoiselle were trustees; for ze Count, he like my own dear master-zat is why I take service with him—and because he love Monsieur Devereux; and mademoiselle-Monsieur Devereux loved her. Let us talk no more," said Alphonse, with a dramatic gesture expressive of grief; "it breaks my heart! Ah, my dear master!" And again Monsieur Duval wept.

But indeed his sorrow was real enough, and

only its cause was assumed.

Heaven knows what agony wrung Vivian Devereux's heart as he rode under the spreading trees of his own fair park, and saw the turrets and gables of the grand old mansion rising up before him; but only to one would he breathe such feelings as filled him to-night—if indeed language could express them.

He did not enter by the grand entrance, but rode up, still apparently guided by Alphonse, to a side door. The mansion was wrapped in sullen gloom; not a light shone in any of the windows on this side—the Count had given orders that only one servant was to remain up

to admit him—not a sound disturbed the silence but the hoof-strokes of the horses on the gravel.

At the entrance Saint Léon dismissed Fred to the stable with the horses, and then he stood quite motionless in the solemn stillness.

"One moment," he said in a whisper, and, stretching out his hand, held that of his faithful follower in a vice-like grasp—and Alphonse felt that he quivered from head to foot, and saw, even through the gloom, that his face was ghastly white, and that drops of anguish stood on his brow. But the victory was gained at length; he was calm once more, at least outwardly, and turned to Alphonse with a strange smile,—

"After all," he said, bitterly, "is Count Saint Léon more unwelcome than Vivian Devereux used to be?"

The door swung back; the old butler lifted high the lamp he held, and its rays fell full on the foreign Count's dark, handsome features.

"God save us!" cried the old man, and nearly dropped the lamp in his agitation. "It might be Sir Vivian himself, sir—your pardon. I—"

He faltered, and turned appealingly to Alphonse, who took the lamp from his trembling hand, which he warmly clasped, while Saint Léon laid his light, gentle touch on the old man's shoulder, and said something which, though in French, the butler could understand, by the voice and manner, was meant to soothe him, and to assure him that there was no need to ask pardon; and then he spoke to Alphonse; and Alphonse, interpreting, said that M. de Saint Léon would not keep the butler from his rest, and needed not his services any But the old man shook his head; Sir Vivian would not have had his cousin neg-He insisted on ushering the Count to the room where supper had been laid, and told Alphonse what apartments had been prepared for the Count and himself; and hardly then could he be persuaded to retire, only that, as he told Alphonse, and begged that he would explain this to the Count, he believed he must have broken down altogether; for he could not bear to look at M. Saint Léon—it broke his heart, it did.

Alphonse had gone out into the hall with the poor old butler; and, softly re-entering the room he had quitted, he saw his master standing by the mantelpiece, his face buried in his folded arms.

He hardly moved as Alphonse came near and stood silent, with clasped hands; but he muttered, brokenly,—

"God help me and strengthen me! It is

more than I can bear."

"God will help you, my dear master," said Alphonse, with intense earnestness. "And one day—one day, soon "—the man's eyes flashed as he spoke—" you will come back to these halls, as spotless before the world as you are before Heaven."

Vivian started, as if this man's solemn enthusiasm had pierced the heavy gloom of his all but intolerable suffering with a ray of dazzling light; but he did not look up at once; he gave Alphonse his hand in silent gratitude, and Alphonse kissed it reverently.

Presently, however, Devereux, ever characteristically thoughtful, in his darkest hours as in his most careless mood, of even trifles that affected others, roused himself, and gently insisted on Alphonse taking refreshment. He himself touched nothing; and when his servant had supped he bade him seek rest.

"I shall not rest to-night," he said, quietly; but do not let the thought of me banish sleep from your pillow, Alphonse. I were best

left. I must fight out this battle alone."

So Alphonse, with ready and delicate tact, withdrew; and then Vivian Devereux took up a lamp from a table, and with noiseless step passed through the wide halls and long galleries that used to echo often to the careless footsteps and merry voices of welcome guests, and now reflected only the passing shadow of their sometime lord—the stern ghost of all that had passed away for ever.

He paused by the arched door, through which

Duke Devereux would have admitted his thoughtless guest. It opened to the silent key that locked it again on the inside. He stood within the sacrarium of this great mansion — the apartments of Stéphanie de Rohan.

Vivian Devereux had all a woman's tenacity of affection, and the hour in which his mother's eyes closed on him for ever lived in the memory of his restless, ambitious manhood, strengthened yet more by the bitter sense of most cruel injustice, with almost all the poignancy of the first anguish. He was before his mother's picture now. With what adoring love he had looked on that likeness as a little child! and then he could turn to the living love, to be soothed, even in his most passionate mood, by that wondrous charm the influence of which had been a power in his life. the vacant chair where she used to sit; the table close by, on which lay the last book she had read, the last dainty piece of work, still unfinished, on which she had been engaged, the graceful statuette — his gift — she had loved to have ever where she could often look at it; her piano, her music, all the dumb forms of beauty and evidences of culture that had surrounded her sorrowful life—these were left to mock him with that awful speech of speechless things. He sank down upon the chair she had left so long since, and the wild grief so sternly controlled till now swept over him like a tempest. If Vera Calderon had seen him in this hour, would she still have held to her stern resolve? Ay, still, "for his sake!"





CHAPTER XXI.

A LOOSE THREAD IN THE WEB.

HE next day Vivian Devereux rode over part of the estate, and expressed himself to the land-steward, who accompanied him, perfectly satisfied with what he saw: indeed, as to agriculture, he frankly admitted he was no judge, but Mademoiselle Calderon was a marvellous manager, and the land-steward was much to be complimented—a tribute which that personage fully deserved. He would have had little opportunity, had he been so disposed, to abuse his trust while Vera Calderon held the reins of power. The peasants stared hard at the foreign Count, and touched their hats; the tenant-farmers hardly knew whether to regard him with favour, because he was so like Sir Vivian, or with antagonism on that very account; but his grave sweet courtesy, even

though he could not speak English, won them

in spite of themselves.

But Vivian avoided Tredegar's farm. He would not willingly incur the pain of meeting bluff old Farmer Tredegar and his pretty

daughter—his old playmate Maggie.

In the afternoon he rode to Rougemont, but not to the Castle, for here the servants had been all his own (Fordham, his favourite groom, was ill; the certain news of his master's death had been "a fearful blow" to him, they had told Vivian at Chandos Royal to-day); and Vivian at once sent Alphonse to Rougemont to see them, and tell them, in more detail, about their master. He was charged also from M. de Saint Léon to say that he would come himself, only he feared that just now his presence might be too painful to his cousin's own servants; in addition, Alphonse was the bearer of a special message to Fordham, who, the Count knew, had been his cousin's favourite groom, and if the man should like to see M. de Saint Léon, the Count would gladly visit How little did the servant guess, when, with tears in his eyes, he sent his thanks to M. de Saint Léon, and said he should think it a great honour if he would come, that what seemed to him a delicate kindness, offered for Vivian Devereux's sake, was the outcome of Vivian's own heart; that the master longed to clasp in his own once more the hand of the

devoted retainer who had roused his master's stern displeasure in his anxious love for that master's honour!

The full blaze of June sunshine was pouring down on the grey-spired church of Rougemont as Vivian drew rein at the churchyard gate. How peaceful and quiet the scene was! There was not a human being in sight; hardly a sound broke the stillness, save the soft wash of the sea beneath the cliffs, and now and then the tinkle of the sheep-bell, or the distant lowing of cattle browsing on the hillside.

Devereux dismounted, and, looping his horse's bridle over the gate-post, crossed the churchyard, and entered the church, which It seemed but yesterday was always open. that he had seen it last; there were the richly-carved choir stalls, black with age, the old tombs with their quaint effigies of recumbent knights; the ragged banners in the Ladye Chapel; but there were changes that the bounty of Vivian Devereux had wrought —Vivian Devereux, who somehow felt as though it had been in truth his spirit and not himself who stood there; that he had died, and was buried far away in a nameless grave, as they all believed. The work he had begun was finished; the grand old Gothic church had been restored to its pristine glory. There were statues in niche and on pedestal, and on the rood-screen an exquisite crucifixion group. The Devereuxs had ever been lovers of splendour and devotees of art; and Vivian had Benjamin's share of these characteristics.

The solemn stillness, the awful sense of loneliness, of being dead to the world, and being here as "a stranger and sojourner" oppressed him; and he turned back towards the door. As he reached the porch he heard a slow step on the gravel path, and there, advancing among the graves, with head bent thoughtfully, even sorrowfully, it seemed, was the well-known venerated form of Wilford Corvn.

Prepared as he was for a sudden meeting with the Rector of Rougemont, this rencontre staggered Vivian more than he could have thought possible; and it needed all his practice of self-command to keep back every sign of recognition. Knowing that the sight of him must startle Doctor Coryn, he stepped aside, as if to make way for him; and the slight sound, as he had intended, made the Rector look up, to see what seemed the very embodiment of his thoughts. Not that, even in that second, he believed he saw Vivian Devereux; yet, though he knew it was not Vivian, but Vivian's cousin, he could not avoid the start, the recoil, the abrupt exclamation of surprise and pain.

"Mon père," said the Count's soft voice, "pardon! I am deeply grieved—"

"Nay, nay," interrupted the Rector, recovering himself in some measure, though his voice shook and his lips trembled; "you will understand me, M. de Saint Léon," he added in French, which he spoke with comparative ease—"it is your likeness to your cousin. I—I shall be calmer directly." He leant heavily on his stick for a moment, and drew his breath hard. "I knew him so little personally," he said, presently, brushing his hand across his eyes, and his voice was still broken; "but I loved him." He paused, and added, in a low voice, "It is hard to see Heaven's hand in this awful blow that has fallen on us all."

Could Vivian Devereux see it? He set his teeth in stern, silent endurance; yet did he need less faith than Wilford Coryn; for he lived to seek the truth, but the Rector believed him beyond the reach of justification.

But presently the Count spoke again; his cousin had told him of doctor Coryn; he knew that Vivian loved and trusted the Rector of Rougemont; and, while he spoke, he watched covertly the doctor's face; but there was no sign of recognition of either feature or voice. The keen eyes of the priest scanned the face of the French Count; and he evidently—indeed he said so—detected, as had Mrs Gresham-Faulkner and others, a ring of Vivian's voice in his cousin's; but that was

Doctor Coryn had clearly no suspicion that the olive-skinned noble who could speak to him only in French was the chief of the House of Devereux, who, in the hey-day of his reckless and haughty youth, had given proof of the sterling gold that lay beneath the surface, when he listened in shamed silence to the faithful man who rebuked him gently but fearlessly for sin. It was music to Devereux to hear the frank expressions of this good man's love for him and faith in him, though he shrank from the praise bestowed on Vivian Devereux; and presently, for now they were walking slowly back towards the gate, he led, without difficulty, to the subject of the murder, and asked if anything had transpired to point suspicion to its perpetrator. Coryn shook his head sadly.

"It is indeed a mysterious crime," he said.
"From that day to this not a single clue has been afforded of the criminal. Miss Calderon never employed detectives; she said she had no faith in them; and, moreover, they had decided that Sir Vivian was the assassin, and, as long as that impression remained unshaken, there would practically do nothing."

they would practically do nothing."

"I think she is right," remarked the Count; "the police are alike all the world over. If you can persuade them to take your view of a case, they will act with zeal, if not always with sense; but, if they have formed an opinion, they are incapable of entertaining

any other."

"A detective did come down about six months after the murder," said Doctor Coryn, "employed, I have been told, by Lady Constance Morton; but nothing came of it. The man was not a week in the neighbourhood. Lady Constance, I believe, inclines to think Sir Vivian guilty."

"Perhaps it would be hardly fair to blame her," observed Saint Léon, gently; "all appearances—at least, so it would seem to many were against him; and there are minds that

must have a victim."

"Ay, narrow minds, that can see only as a horse in blinkers," said the Rector, with unusual bitterness. "It has been argued, who could have obtained the dagger with which the deed was done but Devereux, or some one in the house? But, when it is remembered where it was, it is impossible to say that some one might not have entered the library from the terrace. Clearly it was some one who had a motive in fixing the crime on Vivian; but who that could be is a mystery."

"This Mr Everest," said the Count—"could

there be any motive in him?"

"None that was apparent. Moreover, he was at Melton Parva at the time; that was proved beyond a doubt. Indeed, the question of his guilt never arose."

"D'ailleurs," said the Count, musingly, "he is in London society. I met him at the ball at which I was introduced to Mademoiselle She knows him: she could not Calderon. countenance him if any suspicion could be linked with his name." Mentally he added, "If Percy Everest had the motive—and who knows whether he had or not?—he has not boldness for such a deed. He could act by slander, but not by a deed of blood, directly or indirectly. He is the snake, not the sleuthhound." Aloud he said, "I shall do what in me lies to clear my cousin's name; but at present the path is beset with thorns. I have a view of this matter differing from that which I most frequently hear, though perhaps you, mon père, may agree with it.

They had paused at the gate, and Saint Léon lifted the horse's bridle from the post.

"What view is that?" asked Doctor

Coryn.

"That the clue to this mystery," the Count answered, "lies in the past life of Marmaduke Devereux."

"I do agree with you," said the priest, steadily; "and of this I am certain, that, whether that unhappy man was the direct victim of revenge, or only sacrificed to inculpate his brother, Vivian's hand had wrought no wrong that could cry for vengeance. He was incapable of an offence against honour."

The Count stooped suddenly and kissed the speaker's hand.

"In his name, for his sake, I thank you, my

father," he said, falteringly.

"Would to God," said the priest, utterly overcome, "that I could have spoken those words to Vivian Devereux, and heard his own

lips answer as you have done!"

One day Wilfred Coryn remembered that moment. But, as he walked back slowly to the Rectory, his mind dwelt, as it did so often, on the sealed packet locked up in the old oak cabinet in his study—the packet Vera Calderon had consigned to his charge; and a fearful thought, if aught so vague could be called thought, rose, as it had risen before, like a terrible spectre before his mental vision—terrible, though it had Vera's picture-like beauty.





CHAPTER XXII.

IN THE TWILIGHT.

T was in the deep dusk, and they were together in the library at Temple Rest, these three — Vivian Devereux, Vera Calderon, and Aileen Connor; for Aileen knew who it was who stood there by Vere in the feding light and

stood there by Vera in the fading light, and had given him her heartfelt welcome an hour The light fell on his face; but Vera's was more in shadow, as she stood leaning against the window, wearing for this man who was speaking to her the sombre garb of mourn-Yet, if mourning expressed sorrow other than for death, she might well wear ever the deep crape, assumed to harmonise with a What was it that had made her move fiction. back a little, though Vivian could hardly see her face, and press her hand to her forehead? What made her pause before she answered him, and what wrought the change in her voice, subtle though that change was, yet

perceptible to his ear, when she did answer? He had only repeated the words he had spoken to Doctor Coryn that afternoon, as he parted with the Rector; and had she not herself told him once that she had no faith in Duke Devereux's integrity?

"It may be so," she said, slowly—"I think it is so; but the ground is so uncertain. You saw so little of him; you know so little of his

past life."

"It must be my task to learn more, Vera."

Did the comparative coldness of her manner strike him? He stooped over Alba, who sat at his feet, and then added suddenly,—

"Has Mrs Gresham-Faulkner left London?"

"Yes," the girl said, wonderingly. "Why?"

"Do you know where she is gone?"

"No—abroad, I believe. I do not know where. Again, why? Have you any suspicion, any thought?"

"Nay, nay, mon cœur," he laughed slightly; but she might have known my brother Duke.

Has that ever crossed you, Vera?"

"Never!" said the girl, under her breath.
"I have had no cause to suspect it. I believe

you are mistaken."

She said that with an impatience that seemed as misplaced under the circumstances as foreign to her nature, and walked away to the other side of the room. Was it pain, or surprise, or both, that held Vivian silent? Aileen tried in vain

to see his face; it had grown so dark now that she could discern little more than the outline of his figure. The next moment he followed Vera, and laid his hand on her arm.

"If I have wounded you," he said, bending down, "tell me how; and, if I can, I will

make reparation."

Not a reproach in words, or tone, or look! And she must have sorely wounded him. She forced back the bitter tears that choked her voice as she bowed her head down on his hand.

"Vivian, Vivian, think of me as I was when you first loved me, not as I am now—oh, not as I am now!"

Was she still acting out her miserable part? Was she wilfully uttering words that must one day rise up against her? But, if he wondered, he would not doubt.

"You are now as then, Vera, and then as now," he whispered, as his firm, strong clasp closed over her trembling hands, "save for

the grief that has darkened your life."

She shrank and shivered as if his words gave her intolerable pain, and lifted her head abruptly; but even as her lips parted to speak, the words died unuttered before the look that spoke such fulness of trust and the smile that answered the passionate pleading of her eyes—answered as surely as spoken language, "There is nothing to forgive, for your hand could never wound."

Would eye and smile have the same language one day—one dark day soon, when every incident of these few moments would come back to him fraught with a terrible meaning? Would he then, as now, press his lips to her brow in love stronger than death, as true as Heaven?

She stood so long motionless in the deep gloom, after he had left her, that Aileen came softly forward, and seeing, as she drew near, that Vera's head was bowed, her hands clenched, she spoke her name—

" Vera—Vera, dear!"

The girl started as if a spell were broken, and, with a smothered cry, fell down at her old nurse's feet, hiding her face in her dress.

"Aileen—you heard him—and how I lied to him! but it was for his sake. Aileen"—she lifted her white face, and Aileen could see, even in the darkness, how her eyes glittered with a strange terror—"if he should learn the truth! I cannot trust her—I warned her—sent her away; but in the winter she will return—he will meet her. He already suspects something. She is as clay in the potter's hands to him."

"Better, perhaps, if he knew," said Aileen, with the boldness of desperation; but Vera sprang to her feet, and struck her hands together with a gesture of almost fierce passion.

"Better? God forbid it! It shall not be."

She paused, and added, with one of those abrupt changes of manner which phlegmatic temperaments are apt erroneously to associate with the idea of stormy but merely surface passions, "But the climax will not come from her hand."

"Vera, I understand ye"—the woman bent forward, and spoke in a whisper—"he—the curse of Cromwell light on him!—will have what he has played for, or—"

Vera turned round.

"Revenge," she said, quietly completing the sentence—" and he shall have it."

"Vera"—Aileen grasped the slender wrist
—"what do ye mane, child?"

Vera put both hands on the Irishwoman's shoulders, and, stooping down, looked into her face a moment without speaking.

"That," she said, at length, "I do not breathe even to you, Aileen. But, when the worst shall come, I am ready to meet it."

She dropped her hands and turned away, and the slight black-robed form seemed to vanish like a ghost in the gloom. The gentle closing of the door told Aileen that she was alone.





CHAPTER XXIII.

DON DIEGO'S GHOST AGAIN.

HE moonlight was flooding Vivian
Devereux's path with silver glory
as he walked through the rich glades
of Temple Rest park, skirting the

broad drive to the lodge; and as the tall dark figure in the Spanish cloak which he had flung lightly around him, and low felt hat, flitted in and out among the trees, now in light, now in shadow, it seemed as if some Castilian ancestor of the Calderons had stepped out of his frame.

The calm beauty of the scene, the balmy softness of the summer evening, had no power to soothe his troubled thoughts, and so deeply absorbed was he that he started at the sound of a quick advancing step, as though the presence of any other human being were something abnormal. He looked up and saw a female figure walking rapidly towards him—a figure

he knew at once; and in that instant of recognition he had passed beyond the shadow of a group of trees into the pale and ghastly light of the moon. Maggie Tredegar—for she it was—saw the tall figure in the Spanish cloak and broad hat, and her cry of helpless terror rang through the woods, as, paralysed with fear, she fell upon her knees before the supposed apparition, perhaps with some vague idea of imploring mercy, the ignorant being deeply imbued with the belief that departed spirits are invariably of malevolent disposition.

Vivian did not need the key to this manifestation of fear to divine how easily a superstitious Cornish peasant would conjure into a ghost a man in a Spanish cloak, assisted by the surroundings of trees, moonlight, and evening shadows; and his ever vivid sense of the ridiculous was paramount as he saw the poor girl kneeling and trembling at his feet on the drive, while his habitual courtesy to women, and his kindly interest in Maggie individually, restrained him from, even for a moment, prolonging her agony.

"Mon enfant," he began, advancing and laying his hand on her shoulder—and Maggie shrieked again and cowered down, gasping, "Mercy, mercy!"—"écoute-moi—listen to me. Nay, truly, you are foolish"—in English, but with a decided foreign accent; and now he gently lifted her. "Silly child! Look at

me; do not fear. I am the Count Saint Léon."

He loosed his hold as he spoke, and raised his hat; and the girl sprang back, and gave him one eager look, and then, hiding her face again—this time not in terror—burst out crying. Poor little Maggie! The deadly fear—for she had thought she saw Don Diego again—had so shaken her that the sight of a face so like Vivian Devereux's was too much for her excited nerves, and she forgot at first to feel ashamed for the foolish mistake into which her alarm had betrayed her.

"Allons donc!" said the Count, kindly. And he gently drew the girl's hands from before her eyes, as he had done one summer night two years before. "Dry your tears, mon enfant. I am so grieved to have frightened you; and now I make you unhappy. Why is it?"

"Oh, sir, please forgive me," answered Maggie, checking her tears, blushing deeply, and hanging her pretty head with shame; "but you are so like Sir Vivian, sir, and—and my father is his tenant! I am Farmer Tredegar's daughter, and we all loved him so!" concluded Maggie, nearly weeping again as she finished her incoherent statement.

"Pauvre enfant!"—and there was only chivalrous kindness in the touch of his hand on her shoulder again—"he knew you all

loved him. Would he were living now to repay you! Have no shame for those tears; they honour you. You hang your head still. What is the matter?"

Maggie's head went lower still, and she played nervously with the corners of her little summer mantle.

"I was so silly, sir," she said, in a low voice.

"I thought you were Don Diego's ghost."

"Don Diego's ghost!" repeated the Count, laughing a little—it was Vivian's soft laugh. "What is that, mignonne?"

Maggie looked up, a touch of resentment in her face and voice.

"Don Diego was the ancestor of the Calderons, sir—my lord," she added, as it occurred to her, for the first time, that "sir" was not the correct mode of address for a count. "He was cast ashore, and his portrait hangs in the hall of the Rest, with a cloak like you have on, and a hat much like yours; and he 'walks'—I mean he is seen sometimes. Aileen Connor, Miss Vera's nurse, told me he did."

"And you have seen him?" said the Count,

indulgently, as she paused for breath.

"Yes, my lord, in the shrubbery one night; he came out suddenly, and he was gone before I could run away; and when I told Aileen Connor, she laughed at me at first, and then, when I described what he had on—I did not see his face—she told me Don Diego

'walked' sometimes, but I was not to talk about it. Miss Vera wouldn't like it."

"And so," said the Count, smiling, "you keep your promise of secrecy—for I suppose

you made one—by telling me?"

- "Oh," cried Maggie, "Aileen said so because the servants would be frightened, and—but do you think Miss Vera will mind? Please, sir—my lord"—imploringly—"you won't tell her again? I didn't think there was any harm. I haven't said a word to anyone else—indeed I haven't."
- "Reste tranquille, mon enfant—I will say nothing. I were no Rohan to make a pretty girl unhappy. Are you going to the house?"

"Yes—my lord"—curtseying.

"Do you fear? Shall I escort you? Perhaps best not," he added, as he saw her involuntarily colour and wince. "You are right, mon enfant—then good-night. You will not see Don Diego's ghost, will you?"—smiling a little mischievously as he took her hand.

"Ah, my lord!" Maggie answered, depre-

catingly.

"Pardon! adieu." He touched her hand lightly with his lips with a graceful gallantry free from the faintest tinge of offence, and lifted his hat as she passed him; and Maggie, curtseying low, went on her way.

"Poor little Maggie Tredegar!" said Vivian to himself, with a half-smile and a half-sigh, as he paused a moment, looking after her. "God bless your grateful heart, child! Will Vivian Devereux ever be able to say as much to you —in his own person? Ay—by Heaven!"

He turned and resumed his walk, at a quicker pace this time, and once or twice, athwart his graver thoughts, came with a flash of amusement the memory of Maggie's fright, and the story of the devoutly-believed-in ghost of Don Diego; but, for all serious import he attached to the episode, it might be said to have passed from his mind before he reached Chandos Royal. It remained, however, in the storehouse of memory. Vivian Devereux was one of those men who seldom actually forget anything once seen or heard.





CHAPTER XXIV.

AN ENIGMA.

BOUT the middle of August the trustees of Sir Vivian Devereux's estate received a somewhat formal letter from Roland Chandos-Dev-

ereux, asking for categorical information respecting the death of Sir Vivian Devereux, as to which all that had at present reached him was the account in the newspapers, culled from a statement of the valet, Alphonse Duval.

In reply "M. le Comte de Saint Léon" returned a most courteous letter, enclosing a document, signed by Alphonse Duval, setting forth a circumstantial account of the illness and death of the owner of Chandos Royal. In his letter the Count ventured to advise Sir Vivian's heir to abstain from taking any legal steps to obtain the estates, as the evidence enclosed was not such as would satisfy the Court of Chancery. The trustees had taken

counsel's opinion on the subject; and, in addition to this, the Count pointed out with great clearness, how little legal value could be attached to the relation of the valet, however those who knew the man might be convinced of the truth of his statement, since he could offer no evidence but his bare word. being unable even to indicate the place of Sir Vivian's interment. Whatever their own views might be, therefore, the trustees were not at liberty to yield up the property on evidence that would not satisfy a Court of Equity. This letter Roland Devereux read, marked, learned, and inwardly digested; and, as he saw no reason why he should give up the broad acres of Chandos-Devereux without doing his utmost to obtain them, he further fortified himself with more legal opinions, the result of which was that he wrote in the first week of September to say that, while there could be little moral doubt of Sir Vivian Devereux's death, he should not attempt at present to make good his claim to the pro-And M. le Comte de Saint Léon perty. remarked.—

"You have arrived at a wise conclusion, mon cher cousin. Sir Vivian Devereux has no intention of abandoning his rights, or of dying—if he can help it."

Slowly the autumn months dragged on into winter; and, when the latter season ap-

proached, people began to wonder whether Vera Calderon would come back to London before the regular season. During October and part of November she had been travelling abroad—indeed it had always tried her, accustomed to a wandering life, to remain long in one place—and now, when excitement and incessant change had become a need—a passionate craving—she found the grim solitude of Temple Rest unendurable. Of Vivian, during his short stay at the Royal, she could not see much; and he left in the early part of July, and soon afterwards went abroad. Gresham - Faulkner was flitting about from spa to spa; Everest, after a brief sojourn in France, spent his time at various country houses. Florrie Morton was able to give the first authoritative announcement regarding the moot question whether Vera would or would not go to London for the winter season. had stoutly maintained that Vera would not do such a thing; and here, before her eyes, on the black-edged paper, were Vera's own words,—

"Yes; I shall be in London the first week in December. You will be surprised—disappointed in me, Florrie; the world will wonder. I am sorry for the first, not for the second; the world's judgment is nothing to me—yours a good deal. But I must be convol. II.

tent to be misunderstood. I deserve it, since I cannot explain myself."

"Vivian died in June, in exile, and falsely accused, and Vera flings herself into society six months afterwards!" cried Florrie, in bewilderment. "Mamma, she puzzles me more than ever!"

"It is astounding!" said Lady Constance, applying her handkerchief to her eyes. "I would not have believed it of Vera Calderon."

But, for all that, Florrie held faithfully to her idol; she was puzzled, but she was certain Vera could never fail for lack of feeling.

"It is not only in novels and plays," argued the girl, not unwisely, but rather sentimentally, "that people try to drown the sobs of their own heart in the whirl of society."





CHAPTER XXV.

TO THE BITTER END.

F course you know Miss Calderon is in town? Came last night."
"No, indeed. Where did you

see it?"

"Oh, Lascelles told me! But it was in the

Post too. I wonder you missed it."

"I did not see the Post to-day. I thought she was not expected for another week. Wonder if she'll be here to-night?"

Time—the first week in December; place— St James's Hall; occasion—a Monday Popular Concert; speakers—Lady Mary Grantley and

Mrs Wyndham, subscribers.

"Hardly likely, I should think; and yet she generally does what nobody else does. Odd, her coming back to society so soon! I shouldn't have thought it of her."

"No, hardly. I suppose she has dropped

mourning?"

"Oh, most likely! Whom do you see?"

"Thought I saw Mr Everest—he's in town, I know; but he doesn't patronise the classical in music, does he?"

"He's not musical at all. I suppose Saint

Léon will be in London soon?"

"Soon? Why"—a pause, while the operaglass swept over the fast gathering crowds— "goodness!—why, there he is!"

"Where—where?" excitedly; and every-

body near looked round.

"My dear Lady Mary, you miss seeing Saint Léon. There he is, in the furred ulster,

speaking to Lady Landport."

"I see him," said Lady Mary, levelling her opera-glass at the handsome Frenchman. "Ah, he has gone into the stall next Mrs Berkeley's. To whom is he talking?"

"Oh, little Clem Willoughby! They say the Count speaks excellent English now; he can't be talking anything else to Clem, for

Clem is no linguist."

And so on. Meanwhile the stalls were filling rapidly; and presently, just as the strings were tuning up in the artists' room, the ever-watchful Mrs Wyndham eagerly pulled her companion's sleeve.

"There she is — just entering — in black velvet and silver fur! How superb she

looks!"

Every one stared full at Vera Calderon as

she came up the hall to her place; and Lady Mary Grantley and Mrs Wyndham quite fluttered with delight when the famous heiress of Temple Rest—who was accompanied only by Madame Latouche—entered the row behind She acknowledged Saint Léon, as she passed his row, with a bow and a slight smile; and, when she had taken her place, she scanned the hall—less to single out those she knew generally than to see if Everest or Mrs Gresham-Faulkner were there. Both were in town, but neither was likely to be present this evening, for they did not know she was coming, and to Everest all music was more or less uninteresting. Still it was some relief to Vera to be certain that those spectres of her life were not haunting her—that she could listen to Schumann and Chopin without the knowledge that she must afterwards meet Percy Everest with a show of courtesy, if not cordiality, and endure the fulsomeness of Adeline Gresham-Faulkner.

There was a vacant stall next to Miss Calderon; and in the interval—not immediately, but after the first rush of those who came up to exchange greetings had passed—Saint Léon rose, and, coming round, first shook hands with Madame Latouche, and then with Vera, and then took the empty place.

"I think, Mademoiselle Calderon," he said, smiling, "if the owner of this stall had had the

gift of prescience, he would have occupied it himself. As it is, since no one else has claimed the enviable post, I will venture—always with permission."

"I would not ask any one else," returned the girl, with a sudden flash in the brilliant eyes, a quick curve of the lips, that seemed to

have a touch of coquetry.

So thought Mrs Wyndham, learned in such matters, who contrived, by a truly diplomatic manœuvre, to bring Vera and her companion under the range of her observation. Was the Count's likeness to his cousin obliterating Vivian's memory in Vera Calderon's heart?

"No one ventured to sit by her—not even Lascelles," whispered Mrs Wyndham; "and Saint Léon takes the place as a matter of course. And did you hear what she said?"

Both ladies lent eager ears to the conversation of these two distinguished persons; but, alas! the next words were in Italian, and neither lady was acquainted with that language! However, it was something to add to the conversation of to-morrow's "five o'clock" that Vera Calderon and Count Saint Léon sat behind them and talked Italian, and that she wore velvet and silver fur; and they should never be surprised to hear that he was a favoured suitor of Miss Calderon's, etc.

The Count and Vera remained, like true musicians, to the close of the concert: and

then, as they rose to depart, and the Count placed Vera's mantle about her shoulders, he asked, returning to French, if Madame Faulkner was in town.

"She came back on Friday," the girl answered; adding, with a half laugh, "She receives next Wednesday. You are smitten, M. le Comte—why not go?"

Saint Léon's brow contracted slightly; but

he replied in the same strain,—

"I am engaged for Wednesday—unless"—they had passed out of the row now, and, as she glanced back, he bent forward a little, and added, under cover of the bustle and chatter around—"unless you ask me to come to Carlton-house Terrace."

"Yes, come," she said, directly, wistfully, and yet, too, it struck his sensitive ear unerringly, with a dash of defiance in her tone—defiance of whom?

If he could but have read her heart then! Ay, she was playing a perilous game—but a kind of recklessness was coming over her now. She knew the last cast must be made soon; and it was such happiness, despite the pain and dread, to have Vivian with her! What if there were peril—if Percy Everest began to think this cousin of Vivian Devereux might prove a rival even to the dead? The strong, passionate spirit must sometimes break loose from its chains; and to such natures as this

there is often an irresistible fascination in daring fate.

As the Count and his companion reached the door, a cold rush of air made Vera involuntarily shiver.

"Put up your hood, my dear," said Madame Latouche, hastily. "She never takes proper

precautions, M. Saint Léon."

The Count smiled, and instantly drew the ermine hood over the mass of raven curls, and, as he bent down to the probably not unpleasing task which he fulfilled with all the deftness of a true squire of dames, a man lounging past in the street glanced towards the door, and started, as the full glare of the light within showed him those two figures—the pure rich loveliness of the girl's face, shrined in its soft framework of fur—the man bending over her with that tender gallantry which has ever in it more than a touch of devotion, and is said to be the most delicate form of flattery.

"Pooh!—he can mean nothing!" said Percy Everest, inwardly. "Vivian Devereux had the same manner with women. But these dainty manners cannot be bought, and I have no need of them. Means nothing! H'm! Perhaps, though, he does. No doubt this diplomatic Count is crafty—and it needs no incentive of ambition to kneel at Vera's feet—for he is rich!" And the thin straight lips were pressed tightly together. He drew back

a little, into the shadow, and, half hidden behind a group of young men who had paused te see Vera come out, watched her pass to her carriage with Saint Léon, and smiled as he heard the remarks of those near him upon Vivian Devereux's two trustees.

"She might smile on the Count—why not?" remarked one. "Who knows? Never can tell what a woman may do; and he's so

deucedly like Chandos-Devereux."

"She couldn't yet, you know," drawled another. "Some people think it odd for her to be in society at all now; but to marry six months after Devereux's death! No, no; I think I could condemn even the divine Calderon for such awful bad form as that."

"You will have good cause then," muttered Everest, as he turned away and stepped boldly up to Vera's carriage—"and she will not marry Chandos-Devereux's cousin."

Saint Léon had just handed Madame Latouche into the carriage, and was turning to perform the same office for Vera, when Everest

came up.

"Ah, Mr Everest!" said the girl, coolly, without a change of countenance. "Surely you were not in the hall? I did not see you."

"No, I was passing by just now—I have been dining with a friend," returned Everest, nettled at the Count's somewhat haughty salute; "but you, I suppose, have been in the seventh heaven."

"Hapless man, that you cannot enter into such a heaven!" said Vera, in that half-ironical tone that always stung him, the more keenly that, while he felt it, he could not meet it in kind. "Now I must bid good-night, messieurs, for I must not keep madame waiting."

Was it from mere forgetfulness that she entered the carriage without shaking hands with Everest? He went up to the door, the Count courteously drawing back, and asked carelessly, as if the idea had just occurred to him, whether she would be at Mrs Gresham-Faulkner's on Wednesday.

"No," she said. "Shall you?"

"I think not. Good-night once more."

Mere commonplaces—a means to an end; he held out his hand this time. She was compelled to give him hers. He took it, and, his back being to Saint Léon, and Madame Latouche on the other side of Vera, he grasped it, not hard enough to give pain, but with a pressure that seconded the look he fixed on her face—cruel, merciless, menacing. She read the full meaning of eye and action, and, as she quietly drew her hand away—and he did not seek to detain it—she met his eyes with such a flash of fierce defiance in her own that his wavered, almost quailed, while a strange thrill shot through him. Would she

dare, because Vivian was dead, to brave him to the last?

"M. de Saint Léon," said Vera's sweet voice, steady and clear, without a quiver in it, "I have not bid adieu to you."

Everest raised his hat and turned away, gnawing his lip. His hated touch, then, must be effaced by Saint Léon's!

Saint Léon knew too, though only partially, why she gave him her hand once more. That hand trembled now as he clasped it closely in his own, and, stooping, pressed his lips to it.

"Good-night," he said, softly. "Au revoir." And so his clasp and his kiss were the last on her hand.

But, as the carriage drove off, she clenched it till the blood almost forced itself under the delicate nails, and set her teeth in stern resolve. "He shall never pollute this hand again," she said grimly in her heart. "It is war to the knife now. He has thrown down the gage; the blow will follow. I am ready for the battle—and I shall conquer!"





CHAPTER XXVI.

THE NEAR HORIZON.

NLY M. de Saint Léon, and one or two others?" said Florrie

Morton, dubiously.

She sat in a low chair by the fire in Vera's dressing-room, at five o'clock on the Wednesday afternoon, and close by stood the little table with the dainty service of Sèvres. Florrie was still in deep mourning. Vera sat opposite to her, her right hand playing nervously with her watch-chain. She too was in black, though without any crape—some soft lustreless stuff that fell in flowing lines about her, but, being almost unrelieved by white, gave an added sombreness to the profound and smileless melancholy of her features.

"Yes," she answered, rather listlessly—she was looking into the fire, and did not move her gaze as she spoke—"would you rather not

come down?"

Florrie paused a moment.

"As it will be nothing like a party, I will come," she then said.

Vera lifted her black eyes and surveyed Florrie's mourning garments, and leaned back, with a strange half sneer creeping over her lips; and, as she moved, the brilliant on her finger — Vivian's betrothal ring — caught a reflection from the coals and flashed red fire into Florrie's eyes, making her start. Vera glanced down at the ring carelessly-it seemed so—and then clasped both hands above her thick mass of curls, and so sat, looking at Florrie, still with the ironical curve on her lips. Florrie at first was too amazed to do anything but gaze back at her singular companion; but her look sank at length before the steady stare of the other's large eyes that seemed, while they penetrated her companion's soul, to be seeing something beyond her. The girl grew nervous, as if under a spell. was come to Vera, that she looked so, and assumed even an attitude that expressed a nonchalance she could not feel?

Suddenly Vera dropped her hands upon her knee, and leaned forward.

"I frightened you, did I?" she said, and laughed. "It is odd in me, isn't it? I am forgetting him, am I not? Falling in love with his cousin perhaps? Why not? He is very like him, is he not?"

"Vera!" said Florrie, under her breath. She could add no more.

"I left a sentence unfinished," went on Vera, as if her friend had not spoken. "It is odd in me, I mean, to go into society again so soon—or at all, some would say—at least within ten years; but people don't break their hearts now-a-days as they used to do, even though the man we love is falsely accused, and has to fly his country, and dies all alone in a foreign land, and we cannot go to lay flowers on his grave, for no man knows where it is, and— But never mind; I have made you cry."

Poor Florrie, sorely perplexed and troubled, had indeed burst into tears. Vera watched her for a moment in silence, and the bitter mockery had passed from her face, from her

voice, when she spoke again.

"I am not going mad, Florrie. I wish sometimes that I were. Do you think me heartless? Do you believe that I am forgetting Vivian? No, you need not deny it"—for Florrie looked up with a quick gesture—"you could not so wrong me—wrong me, I said!" She rose suddenly, with a passionate movement, dashing back her long robe. "How could you wrong me? You do not know me. You do not know the lie I am living, the fever that consumes me. I must have excitement—I cannot be alone—I cannot think! Oh,

God!"—wringing her hands—"I cannot bear this burden; it weighs me down, crushes me!"

Florence had risen; and, as Vera spoke

those strange words, she grasped her dress.

"What do you mean?" she said, in a terrified whisper. "Are you talking at random? Do you know what you say?"

Vera paused, and as suddenly as the storm of passion had swept over her it passed away.

"I know what I said," she answered, wearily and quite calmly; "but I have made you unhappy. Forgive me, Florrie. What is it Longfellow says?—

'And though at times, impetuous with emotion And anguish long suppressed, The restless heart heaves moaning like the ocean That cannot be at rest,'—

I can't complete the passage, for the second part will not apply to me; but it is not often I let the tide rise over the barriers; it shall not happen again."

"Vera, dear Vera"—Florrie clasped the soft hand in hers—"if I could only comfort you! I wish you could weep, Vera—anything but speak in that terrible mocking way."

"I will not any more, Florrie," returned the girl, gently and sadly. "Comfort? Ah, no—no human being could give it to such as I am!"

"Vera, you have done no wrong?"

Vera drew her hand away from the warm

clasp, and moved the chair from which she had risen farther back from the fire, turning aside to do this, and so averting her face from her friend—and Florrie remembered even this slight circumstance a few days later. When Vera spoke, it was in her usual manner, ignoring Florrie's wondering exclamation.

"It is getting late, Florrie. Jeanne will come for you in a minute. The world is exacting, isn't it?" She gave the footstool a careless push with her foot, and sat down again, and Florrie felt that the subject was

dismissed.

"I shall come back before I go down," she said, wistfully, as she turned slowly towards the door.

"Do, Florrie—and make yourself charming—but that you cannot help."

When she was alone, Vera clasped her hands together, and fixed her eyes with a long, stead-

fast gaze on the fire.

"What would Vivian say of my acting tonight?" was her thought. "It was successful. In a few days, Florrie will remember what has just passed. A few days," she repeated, half aloud—"and what will he think then?"

With dreary tearless eyes she looked down at the flashing ring on her finger—the ring he had placed there, sign of deathless faith, unbroken troth, and love that casts out all fear; and now she was going to break that solemn pledge. Slowly she drew from her breast—where it ever rested—a small oval miniature, and gazed on the noble face, so worshipped, with a passionate despair in her eyes.

"Can I do it?" she whispered. "Oh, Vivian, it is for thy sake! For thy sake I

am strong even to deal this cruel blow."

She pressed the miniature to her lips and replaced it; and when, a moment later, the maid knocked at her door she was calm and collected again.

There were only a few present on that evening—Saint Léon, Lord Lascelles, a famous musician of European note, a leading painter and his wife, and Florrie Morton.

The latter watched the beautiful hostess. and wondered how she could throw off all traces of such passion as she had recently shown, and sing and play and talk so well. The painter, all unwittingly, asked her to play a piece that was a special favourite of Vivian's, and she played it without hesitation, without any apparent emotion; and, when she sang, there was not a quiver in the full pathetic tones of her voice. But Vivian Devereux noted things that escaped Florence Morton. No one but he would have observed that she avoided him; that in her troubled eyes there was an added pain; that, though she never seemed to do so, she was watching the time, and wishing for the evening to close. The guests did not remain very late; and, when Count Saint Léon, after a formal farewell to his hostess, had escorted the last departure—Florrie Morton—to her carriage, he suddenly remembered that Mademoiselle Calderon had wished to speak to him with reference to some matter of business; and, saying this in the hearing of the footman, he turned back into the house, and went up to the drawing-room floor again.

He trusted to his diplomacy to make the opportunity he wanted, and fate or fortune was on his side, for, as he opened the door of the ante-room, he saw Vera standing near the window, where, perhaps, passing through the room, she had paused a moment to look on the cloudless moonlit sky. She heard the opening of the door, and started with a sudden fear—for once—for a second, losing self-control at Vivian's unlooked-for reappearance. He caught the look and the half recoil and the accent of apprehension in her quick exclamation,—

"M. de Saint Léon! Pardon—you startled me!"

She came forward, to give herself, he knew, the position of vantage, being nearer the door, so that she could the more easily and gracefully put a term to the interview, for she saw at once that he intended to question her. But Vivian was hardly the man to be thus baffled.

He took her hand and quietly led her back to the window.

"What is the matter, Vera?" he then said, bending down. "Tell me."

She shrank from him; her head drooped; she made no answer. Vivian dropped her hand, but only to lay his own on her shoulder with—she felt it, subtle as it was—something of command in his touch; and, though the repeated question was perhaps even more gently uttered, it was more imperative.

"Nothing," she answered, gloomily, still shunning his gaze, and steeling herself not to

shrink again.

"Nothing! A strange answer to give me, Vera—a proverbial excuse for silence!"

She turned her face to the window again and replied,—

"I know it; but I have no other answer to

give."

Vivian removed his hand from her shoulder and folded his arms.

"I have not your full confidence, Vera," he said, in a quiet low tone. "There is some sorrow in your life you will not suffer me to share. Perhaps the secret is not your own. If this be so, forgive me that I questioned you, for it must be pain to you to seem to distrust me. Good-night."

"If you would only trust me less," she said, hoarsely, leaning her burning forehead against

the cold glass, and struggling with heartbreaking sobs—"if you would only trust me less!"

Again those self-condemning words! passed his arm round her and drew her close to him.

"Vera," he said, very gravely, "this must not be. I have surely a right to ask why again and again you imply that my faith in you is misplaced. You cannot shake that faith, but you show me that you suffer, and I am shut out from even the power to give counsel. Why, too, should you shrink from me? I must see you again. It is late now, and I cannot, for your sake, linger longer. Good-night once more."

And he bent down and kissed her lips, those lips that would make him believe a lie that should wreck even his great faith! See her again! Ay, when he next looked on that face, it would be too late to question her; he would know then why she shrank from him, why his love reproached her; he would remember with bitter anguish her self-accusation, her miserable pleading, "If you would only trust me less!"



CHAPTER XXVII.

THE LAST CAST.

HE day that was to mark a turningpoint in Vera Calderon's fate broke bright and clear — the day she was to see Percy Everest for the last time perhaps. She had passed a sleepless night. She had dismissed her maid, telling her that she would be very late, and would not need her. And so she was alone. sounds at length sunk into silence; sleep fell on every member of that household save its She paced up and down her mistress. dressing-room, not outwardly agitated, but the awful anguish of those long hours had not been surpassed even on the terrible night when Vivian Devereux lay a prisoner Bodmin gaol. If Lady Landport, who had once said that Vera often reminded her of that most unhappy face of Beatrice Cenci in Delaroche's marvellous picture, could have seen her now,

she might almost have thought that the artist had beheld in prophetic vision this queen of society on whose head the doom her face foreshadowed must fall before another sun sank in the west.

She had written a brief letter to Aileen, and in it was this passage, — "Whatever may happen in the next few days, Aileen—whatever you may hear—do nothing, by word or deed, till you hear from me again." This letter would reach Temple Rest to-morrow

night.

To-morrow night! As she closed the envelope she rose, and, as she instinctively looked round the room, replete with every luxury, an involuntary shudder passed through her frame. The sensitive nature, nurtured in refinement, shrank not only from the moral degradation, but from the physical surroundings of a prison—from coarseness and ugliness —for, to her, sights and sounds of beauty were not luxuries but necessities; she had "lived among the Olympians, breathing perfumed air"—a world in which the heart might break, but taste would never be shocked, eve and ear never be outraged—a world of graceful forms and harmonious colours, of voices softly modulated, the very accent speaking of culture and leisure. And this new and awful life that she had read about sometimes as a child, and looked upon in

vague wondering pity, as children of ready sympathies and warm imaginations will looked down upon from among the "golden exhalations" of the bright world so far above it—this life that had seemed so unreal, so cruel, had been for two years daily, hourly, before her eyes; and to-night she stood on its threshold. She saw herself, pale and haggard, in garb of shame, a mocking spectre of her former self, moving in the monotonous round of that dismal existence. Last night she was the central figure in a splendid assembly; the crowd came round her when she entered; her smiles were sought, her most careless words listened to with attention; the light of jewels flashed with her every movement. To-morrow would see her in a prison-cell, while hands that had toyed with the jewelled fan wandered over the piano's ivory keys did the prisoner's ignoble task; not commanding now, but obeying; shut out from life and hope; knowing there was music beyond those prison walls she could not hear, beauty she could not see, voices that were of a sphere in which she had no part or lot now in a world of blasphemy and quarrelling, of ignoble triumph over the great lady brought low. The hideousness of depravity, the ugliness of debased humanity, were to be Vera Calderon's surroundings. how long? She looked at her delicate hands. Would they give her hard work to do? Perhaps not—at first—until she got used to the changed life—used to that awful routine of rising up and lying down, of walking round a paved yard, of sitting in a dreary chapel, and doing an allotted task in an allotted time. There were priceless rings on the hands she clasped and unclasped so often to-night. They were symbols of this life that was passing away from her; they would have nothing to do with that other life. Vivian's ring she would send back to him.

"I can never be more to him than I am now," she said, with white lips that did not tremble. "He kissed me to night for the last time perhaps, unless I should not live through that prison life, and then they would let him see me when my last hours came. But I think I can live it through—I think I can; they would not give me many years. I shrank from him to-night. I thought my heart would break indeed when he took me in his arms and kissed me; but now I am so glad he came back."

So the dawn broke grey and sad in the eastern sky, and Vera drew aside the curtain and looked out, and watched the light spreading over the heavens—the light of the advancing day that was bringing her fate nearer to her—the day that must part her from Vivian Devereux, perhaps for ever.

"My dear," said Madame Latouche, when

the girl met her in the breakfast-room, "you look deathly; you give yourself no rest."

She did not like to say how startled she felt; but Vera saw it in her eyes. She merely answered, however,—

"I cannot rest. I shall never rest again;"

and she bent over Alba.

"You will go back to him now, Alba," she half whispered. "I wonder if you will remember me when I am in prison?"

An hour later she summoned a footman to

her boudoir.

"William," she said, "I expect Mr Everest to-day; he comes on very important business. Let him be shown into the library at once; but—remember—I am not at home to anyone else—not even to Miss Morton and M. de Saint Léon. This is my strict command."

And William retired, wondering at these

unusual orders.

Half-an-hour later he knocked at the door again. Vera, walking up and down, stopped, and calmly bade him enter.

"Mr Everest is in the library, ma'am."

"Thank you. I will come directly."

So Saint Léon had been announced, in almost the same words, and she had waited for him in this very room—waited for Vivian Devereux—the man for whom she was now going to lay down more than her life. That day she had gone to meet a lover—to-day an

awful fate that must tear her from his arms for ever.

She paused not a moment. There was neither tremor nor hesitation. She passed quickly down the stairs, and did not even halt outside the library door, but opened it at once and went in.

Percy Everest stood at the farther end of the room, and as Vera advanced he scanned face and form with a keen and questioning look. Her face was always pale; now her very lips were almost hueless, and in her stern hopeless eyes there was a strange glitter. She was clothed entirely in black velvet, and that mourning garb enhanced the effect of the whole picture. She looked, moved, like a woman going to her death. A thrill of awe, almost of fear, passed through Everest as he gazed at this most unhappy girl; but not one thought of relenting flashed into his mind.

Vera, pausing a few paces from where Everest stood, rested her hand lightly on the table; and at that moment Everest caught the flash of Vivian's ring, and a sudden fierce gleam in his eyes seemed to answer it. She saw this; but there was no change in her own face, as she said very quietly,—

"After what passed the other night, I expected you to-day, and I can anticipate what you are about to say; but I will hear you out."

"There is little to say, Vera," said Everest, watching her while he spoke. "You have but to recall what I told you six months ago, when the first news of Vivian Devereux's death reached London. I am simply here now to reiterate those words. I have given the grace that the customs of society demand. months may seem short to form new ties. even if the old had not been so rudely and cruelly broken; but I have suffered you long enough to play with me-almost defy me. You hope, doubtless, that death may haply intervene and rob me of victory; cherish such hope no longer. There is no mercy - no drawing back. You would willingly slav me as I stand here; but would you more willingly face the alternative of defying me—now, too, that Vivian Devereux is dead?"

He leaned forward a little as he ceased speaking, and laid his clenched hand on the table, as though to enforce those merciless words; but Vera did not move. He could see the velvet bodice rise and fall over the labouring heart—that was all.

She answered him at once in a steady, even voice, and looked at him with some subtle change in her eyes that grew upon him while she spoke.

"You are wrong; I cherish no hope—I know that there is neither mercy nor drawing back. How should there be? Cruel and

dastard you have been from the beginning, cruel and dastard you will be to the end! You think"—as he smiled a little scornfully at these last words—"that you can afford me—as you once told me—the barren pleasure of stinging words, since in your hands rests the ultimate triumph. For that reason you bore with me when I poured contempt on you; the bird might struggle in the net, and beat its wings and cry out against its captor—you could look on and laugh. You deemed the net secure; but what if a mesh were broken? What if the bird broke loose and escaped?"

"The simile hardly holds good," said "Listen to me again, Vera. me once more place the case clearly before you, and give you your choice for the last You need my silence; that silence must be bought—the price is yourself. I know "-now he will take none other. leaned forward again and spoke with cruel emphasis—"that while Vivian Devereux lived you hoped against hope. You loved him, and you love him still. You will love him always; but what is there to hope for now? What can stand between you and the vital necessity of keeping the truth hidden to the end?"

Like a mantle assumed at will the stony calm Vera had hitherto preserved fell from her. Not that she spoke even now with any violent display of emotion; but in face and mien, in every tone of the voice, there was the surge and quiver of a passion that shook

her like a tempest.

"You tell me," she said, "that you have suffered me to play with you long enoughthat the hour of reckoning has come, and the victim must be ready! The victim is ready; but not for the sacrifice you seek. I have played with you-fooled you-yes, though I was in your power—fooled you into believing that I would sacrifice soul and body to purchase your silence—you who from the beginning have been a traitor—who sought hospitality to be within reach of revenge, and embraced in that revenge those who had wrought no wrong, striving, by pitiful slander, to injure a man who was guiltless towards you and yours—hating him, as base minds hate, because he had all that you lacked, and because he saw you were not what you seemed, and distrusted you, and not only because he was Chandos-Devereux; — you who taunted that man with cruel insult when the shame you knew to be unmerited fell on him! Has not all this been enough, but must you fill up the measure to overflowing, and claim no less a price for the silence that honour and mercy should keep—if kept at all—than the hand of the woman who, in giving it to you, must give up with it honour, love, peace, and all

hope in the future? Never—no, not for one moment, so help me God! did I dream of sin so black, of misery so blank, as becoming your wife! I played with you—fooled you—ay, let me repeat it;—I tried to put off the evil day; but I never meant, when it came at last, to buy security from the world's contumely by a deadly sin, stripped of all that can plead for mercy, without even the excuse of love!"

Everest had listened to Vera without interruption, at first too utterly amazed for even the thought of it, afterwards held silent by fierce wrath, strangely blended with awe of this woman, who heaped such bitter scorn upon him, who defied him with such passion. But, when she ceased and stood facing him, a flush on her cheek now, her dark eyes burning, her left hand, on which the diamond flashed and scintillated, grasping the golden cross on her breast, but still trembling, then the man regained the power of speech and action, and struck his own hand on the table with such violence that a slender glass ornament standing on it was shivered into fragments.

"Do you tempt fate?" he said, through his teeth. "Do you dare to stand before me and tell me you have fooled me from the beginning, and will brave the worst rather than become my wife? Be it so, then! I take up the gage you have thrown down. And remember that when I place my foot on the path your own hand has indicated, I will not turn

back, though you kneel to implore me!"

"Kneel to you, Percy Everest! Well, I have stooped so low that you may have some right to believe I could be guilty of even this degradation. I have endured your insolent triumph, your merciless manifestations of power, but I think my very limbs would fail me before they bent in the humiliation of appeal before you. No; I shall ask nothing of you. I ask nothing now. I offer you your choice,—not between what you have played for and vengeance—the first is lost—but between the revenge that lies ready to your hand and that which I shall give as an alternative; and I know you will simply choose that which will best carry out your purpose. You cannot have the broad lands of Temple Rest and the status of its lord; you want re-It is yours." venge.

"It is mine, by Heaven! I see the meaning of your sudden resolution. It is this Count Saint Léon who has steeled you to defiance—the truth would not be a barrier

between you and Devereux's cousin."

As he uttered those words, he strode forward towards the door; but Vera stepped before him.

"Hold!" she said, with a voice and manner

that perforce arrested his steps. "First hear me; then—if you will—if, for your life's sake, you dare—I am weighing every word I utter—go to M. de Saint Léon and repeat to him the whole truth, and add to it the charge you have this minute brought against me."

She saw that her words produced an immediate effect. The man was a coward at heart; his face turned white; he fell back

involuntarily.

"I will hear you," he said, assuming a sneering tone, which did not for a moment deceive her.

Vera laid her hand on the back of a priedieu chair near her, but it was quite steady now. In her next words she took the final step and sealed her fate.

"Your surest way to be revenged on me," she said, "is to keep silence still, and suffer me to be condemned as the murderess of Mar-

maduke Devereux."

Deathly silence. Vera was measuring the effect of this first move in the game; and it was what she had foreseen. Everest drew back, gazing at her wonderingly, at first hardly seeming to comprehend her meaning; but as it grew upon him, the truth being strengthened by the memory of words she had spoken from time to time that flashed back upon him fraught with a new significance, his manner changed. His mind, quick and keen, if not

brilliant or profound, saw what he deemed the flaw in her armour. He could not, however, go farther and perceive that Vera Calderon was not a woman to leave a joint for her

enemy's arrow to pierce.

"A noble sacrifice of self," he said at length, with a sneer; "and no doubt your plan has been well matured! You can easily reduce the crime to manslaughter—you, a young and beautiful woman, an heiress, and a leader of society. A year's imprisonment, and you would be free again, and Count Saint Léon would overlook the crime, and the silence that allowed his cousin to suffer; or perhaps you would tell him the truth, and he would pity rather than blame you. No, Vera Calderon; you have refused me your hand with bitterest scorn—you shall feel the full weight of mine."

"As you will. You think that I have learned already to forget Vivian Devereux, that I only seek to avert a shame that would be a barrier between M. de Saint Léon and myself. But first let me ask you one question. If Vivian Devereux were living, would you make the choice you have made now? Would you have no cause to fear him? You knew him to be a man of fierce passions and strong will; you knew that, if a priceless friend, he would be a dangerous enemy; and more—I tell you this—and who should know him better than I?—that the truth would not

part him from me. For all I have suffered he would love me, if that were possible, the more deeply. The sin and the shame were not mine; he would bow even his pride for his love's sake. Ay, Percy Everest, you know not, you cannot know, what such a man will do and dare for the woman who loves him and has borne what I have borne for his sake!"

Did there for one moment shoot across that man's evil nature a ray of light, a yearning to comprehend, if even but vaguely, the sublimity of self-sacrifice shown to him here, the wonderful power of love and devotion that Vera Calderon painted in colours glowing with the vividness of faith and trust? If so, that light passed quickly—too brief in its passage to leave a transient trace in the cruel eyes, a quiver on the cruel lips.

"If Vivian Devereux were alive!" he said, slowly. "Is this a time for chimeras—for raising false issues? If you have a motive, I cannot fathom it."

"I have a motive—a simple one."

Throughout this interview no change in him, however slight, had escaped Vera's penetrating gaze, and she saw how he started and quailed at the mere thought conjured up by her supposition—the dread of Vivian Devereux's vengeance. The game was her own now. She leaned over the back of the chair, and fixed

her clear eyes on his face with something of

mockery in their luminous depths.

"I put, as you thought, a chimerical case," she said, steadily, "to see how you would meet the idea. But it was no chimera. Vivian Devereux is living."

"Living! Vivian Devereux living!"

The words dropped slowly from his livid lips, as if each one were wrung from him by some invisible and irresistible power. He stood gazing at her blankly for a full minute; and she, unflinching—nay, with almost fierce triumph in her eyes now—met that gaze and bore it down. Then he saw all clearly.

"So," he said at last, in a voice so changed and hoarse that it hardly seemed his own, "Rohan, Count of Saint Léon, is Vivian Devereux—this man who affected not to know me, not to have heard my name, is Devereux of Rougemont, who told me he would horsewhip me like a dog wherever he met me! Did he think—did you think—I should ever forget that? If I had not hated him for his very name's sake, I would have treasured that threat to hurl back at him one day. he was trembling as he spoke with repressed fury—"ay, and his answer to me in the courtroom—and, by Heaven, his hauteur to me now—for I read it aright! Let the drama be played out to the end. You have acted your parts well, you and your lover, Vera Calderon; what a pity it is destiny did not place two such actors on the stage—that the tragedy is one of real life!"

"Yes, it was well played," returned the girl, in a quiet, passionless kind of manner, singularly at variance with the strong emotion that had preceded it; "and you do well, Mr Everest, for your own sake, to remember what Vivian Devereux said to you—that he would not forget it if you brought shame to Tredegar's daughter by coupling her name with his. Would he be more merciful if he knew what far more bitter cause he had for vengeance?"

Everest folded his arms. He quailed again, and she saw it; but he had art enough not to show openly how sharp a shock of fear the knowledge of the supposed French Count's true identity had given him, and self-control was assisted by the further knowledge that it rested with him whether Vivian Devereux should learn the truth with regard to his own part in events.

He did not immediately answer Vera. He stood silent, his mind dwelling on the two subjects so closely interwoven—the fact that Vivian Devereux lived, and the terrible revenge, worse than shame and banishment, that Vera had wilfully placed, as it were, in the hollow of his hand. Percy Everest was not a man of volcanic passions; his hatred was malignant, taking count of trifles—relentless, with the

cruelty of a temperament incapable of passionate love, but in which—as is often the case, as though in compensation—vindictiveness has the power of a passion, possessing that grim ferocity which, when the prey is secured, is in no haste to destroy it, but watches it with a quiet pleasure, and can think clearly over all collateral issues, past, present, and future. So Everest's mind rested now at first on the disclosure Vera had made, and it seemed strange that no suspicion of the truth had ever crossed him.

The matter was so simple, after all. own words, carelessly uttered at Chandos Royal, had been verified; Vivian had personated his cousin, and no man had discovered It was some consolation to reflect that Vivian himself had acted his part with such consummate art that those who had known him well had found no cause to suspect who the pseudo-count really was; and the story told by Alphonse was carefully contrived to make the whole world believe Chandos-Devereux dead, and so disarm suspicion of the Count Saint Léon, if it should arise, while it was so vague as to shut the door on proof and secure to the sceming trustee the rule of his Then Everest turned to the own property. thought of the fell revenge by which he could trample on the heart of the man he hated and the woman who had scorned and defied him. He weighed all, he considered every point;

and then he spoke.

"I have read," he said, his eyes travelling slowly upwards to Vera's face, after pausing for a moment to rest on Vivian's betrothal ring,—"I have read in heroic legends of women who gave themselves a willing sacrifice for those they loved. This story of modern life, this story of Vera Calderon, will match the noblest of those tales. You would restore the banished lord of Chandos and Rougemont to land and honour—restore him to the goodwill of the world—give him back his spotless name, his glorious career; yet in doing this you rob the casket of its most priceless jewel -you restore the field of ambition, but rob the heart of life and light. He must lose you for ever, he must believe you guilty of crime, cowardice, and treachery "-he watched her narrowly to see if she flinched, but there was not the quiver of a muscle, not even a momentary dilation of the eyes shining with the steadfast light of high resolve; "to save your fatal secret, and to save Vivian Devereux, you fling yourself into the breach, and place an everlasting barrier between his life and yours. might break through the barrier of a reflected disgrace; but he would not dare so to brave the world as to take to his arms the woman whose hand, even under dire provocation, had shed his own brother's blood—the woman

who, for that crime, had endured imprisonment and who—far worse—had suffered the man who loved her and trusted her with such unquestioning faith to bear all the burden of her guilt."

"Do I need your lips to tell me all this?" asked Vera, calmly. "You have chosen your revenge; gloat over its sweetness in silence and alone. I know no reason why this

interview should be prolonged."

She moved slightly from her position, as

though she would turn to the door.

"Stay!" cried Everest; and she paused in haughty impatience. "Before you and I part," he went on, "there are three questions that have to be considered. The first regards Adeline—"

"I understand," interrupted Vera; "but a moment's thought, Mr Everest, might have assured you that I could be trusted in so simple a matter of business. My solicitors will be instructed; and, so long as the conditions are fulfilled, Mrs Gresham-Faulkner can retain her chance of winning a coronet. Your next question I believe I can divine. You would say—Suppose I am not believed? That risk must be incurred by you as well as by me; but remember this—that I have no apparent motive for making the disclosure except the one I shall give—remorse. Vivian Devereux's disguise has not even been suspected. What is the third question?"

"This. What if Chandos-Devereux refuses to believe you—what if he seeks the truth from your own lips? Vera Calderon, with all your rare strength of will, you are a woman

-and you love him."

"What can you know of a woman's love, Percy Everest?" answered Vera, with a contempt too deep for passion. "Do you tremble already for the success of your revenge? Truly it were a happier lot to be a very outcast—a life of shame and a suicide's death—than to be your wife. Leave me now. I might hope that I should see your face no more, but I know I shall see it once again-when I am led forth a condemned prisoner. You will come to look on me and taunt me as you taunted him! That touches you. You feel the lash -you wince, and fear also! Ay, I can read your coward soul," she said, slowly; "and you might have reason enough to fear me—for, if ever woman owed to man a debt of deadly hatred, I owe that debt to you, Percy Everest; —yet so great is my scorn that I can scarcely think I hate you. Are you answered?"

"By Heaven, yes!" said Everest, and an evil light gleamed in his eyes. "The tongue that can drop such gall is best sealed in a prison-house." He laid his hand on the door, paused, and looked back. "I shall see you again," he said. "You have dared, defied, despised, tricked me, in your last moments of

freedom; I will come to look on your fall, and see what the world thinks of you, and how you face that world in which you were—are, for this one day more—a queen."

Her features, her mien, were sublime, as she

turned to him.

"A queen I shall still be—even then!" she said. "Yes, come and see me; let a coward

see how a brave spirit meets its fate."

The barbed shaft was hurled back at him. As she stood before him, he gazed at her a moment dazzled, abashed; the magnitude of the whole awful sacrifice she was making was revealed to him, and the vision appalled him. He hid his face from her and went out, and the door closed between them.

She stood, for fully five minutes after she was alone, like one stricken with catalepsy—motionless, with locked hands, face and form as rigid as if wrought in stone. Then suddenly she staggered, caught blindly at the table near her, and fell forward on her knees—sank lower, and lay prostrate on the floor. For the first time in a life of agony the oblivion so often vainly yearned for closed over the broken heart.

The library bell rang, and William, Vera's special attendant, hastened to answer it. His mistress rose from the table where she had been writing.

"William," she said, quietly, "take my regards to Madame Latouche, and ask her kindly to excuse me from joining her at luncheon to-day, as I must go out on business that cannot wait. Then order the brougham to come round at once. Lastly, take this letter yourself to M. de Saint Léon's chambers in Pall Mall, and deliver it to Alphonse or to the Count himself—to no one else."

"Yes, ma'am." William looked wistfully in his mistress's face, and sighed heavily as he left the room.

Twenty minutes later Vera stepped into the brougham, and the footman asked where the coachman was to drive her.

"To Bow Street," she said, in her usual clear, soft tones and distinct enunciation.

Yet the man thought he could not have heard correctly.

"I beg pardon, miss," he said, hesitatingly.
"To Bow Street," repeated Vera. "Bow

Street Police Court."

"The police court?" said the coachman, in a wondering undertone, when he received the message. "What in the world for? There's been no robbery—nor nothing!"

"That was my orders," returned the footman; and he stood on the pavement and watched the brougham out of sight. "Bow Street Police Court!" he muttered, in bewilderment. "What can my lady want there? But then," he added, philosophically, and not very appositely, "Miss Calderon was never like

other people."

And he returned to the house, and communicated in the servants' hall the intelligence that Miss Calderon had gone to Bow Street Police Court. But they thought he was joking, and only laughed at him.

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